China promotion sells Aussie grapes

Inside

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  - IPA Congress 2012 report
  - Top working of new varieties

- ATGA
  - Aussie exports – destination Asia
  - Bound for London, winner of the Much-a-bunch competition
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Cover: Australian table grape promotion in JUSCO supermarkets in Southern China. It was the first time Aussie grapes had been promoted in China.

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How the year unfolded

The past harvest season will go down as producing one of the better results in recent times.

This was mainly due to the current prices being paid by the major processors. My gross returns in 2012 were as follows; sultana $13,293 per hectare ($5,382/acre); currant $14,830/ha ($6,004/acre); Sunnuscat $14,857/ha ($6,015/acre).

There aren’t too many commodities making these sorts of returns. The solid prices are very positive news for the industry, and look like continuing with the shortage in global supplies. It is great news for anyone considering venturing into dried fruit production or for current growers considering expanding their blocks.

While prices were solid, growers were adversely impacted by rain events in February, with the most severe damage occurring on Sunnuscat, in most cases. The broader impact on growers was due to the rain effect on fruit colour, with larger amounts of dark fruit being delivered to processors, although this fruit was generally sound and good quality.

Importantly, the average yield in 2012 was better than 2011, with feedback from processors and growers suggesting that fruit weighed better that originally expected.

The general view of the Dried Fruits Australia Board, including processor members, is that the 2012 crop will probably reach about 14,000 tonnes, or close to double last year’s crop size. This lift in production is heading the right way, and will help re-establish Australia as a reliable supplier of high quality dried fruits on both domestic and export markets.

New varieties

Feedback from growers, confirms that the new dried grape varieties, Sunglo and Black Gem, are continuing to perform well. The latest report provided to the Unique Dried Grape Varieties Steering Committee on Friday 8 June 2012, showed that Sunglo yielded 10.1 tonnes/ha (4.1 tonnes/acre). It should be noted that this result was produced on a small patch of 0.15ha. For comparison, the Sunnuscat yield on the same property was 9.5 tonnes/ha (3.85 tonnes/acre).

Black Gem was reported to have produced well, with a major benefit being its resistance to disease. Reasonable quantities of Sunglo vines are available from the licensed nurseries, although only a limited number of Black Gem are on hand.

Bud fruitfulness results

An assessment of the bud fruitfulness of canes shows that fruitful buds are distributed evenly out to bud 15. The average fruitfulness to bud 15 is almost 60% fruitful buds

MDBA draft plan

As I reported previously, Dried Fruits Australia and a number of horticultural industry organisations submitted a joint response on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority’s (MDBA’s) draft Basin Plan. The industry groups involved with Dried Fruits Australia were Murray Valley Winegrowers, Murray Valley Table Grape Growers Council, Almond Board of Australia, Summerfruit Australia and the Murray Valley Citrus Board.

My main concern is that most submissions to the MDBA appear to have been totally ignored. Importantly, at this stage, both the Victorian and New South Wales Government have expressed strong opposition to the Basin Plan as it is.

Wage decision

Most grower members will be aware that Fair Work Australia recently announced that as a result of the latest review, it had decided that the minimum wage should rise by $17.10/week. Dried Fruits Australia has updated the Block Wages Sheet for members. See insert with this edition of The Vine.

Annual conference 2012

The Dried Fruits Australia Annual Conference, incorporating the Annual Growers’ Forum and an Annual General Meeting for members, will be held on Tuesday 9 October 2012. See separate article on page 23.
Chairman’s report

Gateway to Asia

I trust this year’s harvest is well and truly over and the task of pruning is well under way for the next harvest for us growers based in the southern region - those in northern tropical areas will be well advanced in their vine management for the 2012/2013 season.

With prices for table grapes never as high as we hope for, it seems nowadays there are significant downward pressures on all food commodities, not just fresh food produce. Consumers have an abundant choice of fresh fruits available to them and they are all good options for a healthy lifestyle.

All the industries promote their product well, so it is quality that ultimately determines whether or not consumers will purchase table grapes or look to alternative fruits.

I am pleased to say table grape quality was much improved this season. The presence of quality table grapes kept consumers coming back for more, which was a blessing with such large volumes of fruit on the domestic market.

Perhaps now is the time to decide whether we grow quantity or quality table grapes for the next harvest.

South Korea

South Korea’s growing demand for imported table grapes provides a positive outlook for Australian table grapes. A delegation of growers, exporters and industry representatives visited South Korea in mid May. The draft protocol should be released from the South Korean Government in the next few months and it is anticipated that legal access will be obtained.

This visit was an opportunity to meet with leading importers and retailers in Shanghai and Guangzhou. We visited wholesale markets and other retail outlets to investigate how table grapes were being promoted and merchandised.

The opportunities in China are immense. However, we must consistently supply quality table grapes and keep promoting them to the consumer.

Japan

The cold treatment verification trials have been completed. The data now has to go back to Japan for formal verification and let’s hope for favourable outcomes. Congratulations to Dr Francis De Lima and his staff at the Western Australian Agriculture Centre in Perth for a job well done.

As growers we have the opportunity to attend grower meetings, contribute, raise issues of concern and influence the progression of the industry. The Australian Table Grape Association (ATGA) conducts grower meetings annually throughout the growing areas and I encourage you to become involved with your local associations.

Through your local association or state representation on the Board of ATGA you can inform the industry about your regional achievements and learn about the key issues on the agenda of your peak industry body.

In conclusion let us never stop striving for better quality and promotion of Australian table grapes as a fresh food for a healthier consumer, both in Australia and overseas. Until next edition.

Angie Pangiotaros

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Angie Pangiotaros
Victoria

Deputy Chairman:
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Queensland

Executive Delegates:
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Chief Executive:
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Western Australia

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New South Wales

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New South Wales

Matt Katich

Western Australia

Anne Larard

Northern Territory
After successfully gaining market access to China last year, the Australian table grape industry has made strong inroads into this new market this season.

Australian growers and exporters were keen to see an increase in last season’s volumes to China. With the new protocol accepted late in the season only one container was sent directly to China in 2011.

This year Chinese quarantine officials travelled to Sunraysia in March for pre-clearance inspection of containers bound for China.

Australian Table Grape Association (ATGA) Chief Executive Jeff Scott said the ATGA hosted two Chinese Inspection Quarantine Authority (CIQA) inspectors in Sunraysia for three weeks however timing proved to be less than ideal.

“The early Crimson Seedless had already been harvested in Mildura before their arrival and weather conditions were not conducive to colouring the remaining crop during their limited time in Australia,” Mr Scott said.

“Growers who had planned to use the pre-clearance service unfortunately did not have adequate evenness in the colour of their premium fruit to pick a container.”

Mr Scott said growers were committed to picking and packing quality fruit for this new market and as a result they elected to wait rather than present fruit for pre-clearance which they felt was less than their best.

This slow start did not deter the industry and by the season’s close it is estimated that 800 containers of table grapes worth approximately $50 million had been exported to China and Hong Kong.

The season
Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Manager for Thailand and China Bryan Balmer said that although fruit volumes were down in Sunraysia this season, the quality was good and fruit travelled well rewarding growers and exporters with good prices in China.

“Australian growers were faced with competition from southern hemisphere producers, Chile, Peru and South Africa, and had the added burden of a strong Australian dollar that was at parity with the US dollar or above,” Mr Balmer said.

“As a result Australian table grapes were the most expensive in the market, but the good quality and regular shipments meant it all sold well and cleared.”

Building relationships with buyers
This year’s good results did not happen overnight; the industry has been working on market access for eight years and has established solid relationships with buyers in China.

Mr Balmer said one of most important benefits from gaining direct access to China was that Australia was now able to promote Australian fruit and build a reputation for the supply of high quality fruit.

“In the last 12 months a number of Chinese importers have visited the Sunraysia region to inspect grapes and meet with growers/ packers and exporters,” he said.

Victorian Minister for Agriculture and Food Security Peter Walsh said the DPI hosted a delegation of major Chinese importers from Shanghai and Guangzhou in March. The importers met with Victorian table grape exporters and visited table grape properties in Mildura and Robinvalle.

“The importers were impressed with the quality, colour, crispness and taste of the Victorian table grapes and placed orders for 30 containers of primarily Crimson Seedless grapes,” he said.

There have also been a number of visits by Australian companies to China to meet with importers and retailers to understand the requirements of the market.

Earlier this year the Victorian DPI led a study tour to South Korea (see page 38) and China to investigate the opportunities for Australian table grapes.

Mr Balmer led the China component of the tour, which began in Shanghai, arguably the most important market within China for Australian table grapes in China.

“Now that legal market access has been gained table grapes can be shipped directly into central (Shanghai) and northern (Dalian) ports and arrive fresh and not have to be transhipped through Guangzhou,” Mr Balmer said.

“Longwu market in Shanghai is the second largest import fruit market in China. The
group met with market management to get a better understanding of the logistics as well as Chinese quarantine officers (CIQA) to understand the import process.

“The five grower/exporters also had the opportunity to network and have one-on-one meetings with about 10 import companies.”

Irymple grower George Moraitis said particularly in the Northern China markets he received encouraging messages from importers that they wanted to do business with Australia, directly through the front door.

“I found the trip to China very encouraging and have come home to take a fresh look at my vineyard and record keeping, I will assess exactly what I need to do to enter this market next year,” he said.

“Working within the China Protocol is essential and I am fairly certain that my current systems including insect monitoring and spray records will only need minor modification.”

Mr Balmer also took the group to Shanghai supermarkets and other retail outlets to investigate how table grapes were being promoted and merchandised. Meetings were also held with Tesco and RT mart supermarket chains whilst in Shanghai.

The group then travelled to Guangzhou in southern China.

“Guangzhou is the largest trading hub in China and is also the largest import port for fruit. Fifty thousand containers of import fruit arrive at the Jiagnan wholesale market every year,” Mr Balmer said.

ATGA Chair Angie Pangiotaros said Chinese importers had a high sense of expectation for the delivery of fruit.

“We saw delivery of high quality Australian fruit with green stems and firm berries. The consignment was very consistent and sold quickly with a good price,” he added.

He said other consignments that were not consistent took longer to sell.

“Packing and presentation is essential if we are to succeed in China. The fruit must be of even size and colour and does not have to be large size berries. Furthermore, every box in the consignment must be the same.”

Building relationships with consumers

Mr Balmer said one of the most important benefits of direct access was that Australian fruit could be promoted to the Chinese consumer, a point reiterated when the study tour met with management of JUSCO supermarkets.

“This was the first time that Australian table grapes had been promoted to Chinese consumers and the results were very promising.”

“Up until now, even though Australian grapes found their way onto Chinese supermarket shelves, wet markets and food carts they could not be promoted as Australian fruit,” he said.

“And even though we may have supplied some of the best eating quality table grapes on the market, consumers did not know where they came from.

“With market access comes the opportunity to link that terrific eating experience with Australia and have Chinese consumers coming back and asking for more Australian grapes.”

Mr Balmer said China offered the table grape industry a chance for huge growth.

“Supermarkets and other traditional retail outlets are growing at an incredible rate as the population moves from rural to urban living.

“Disposable incomes are also on the rise and with this the means to buy quality fruit.”

To capitalise on this opportunity and begin to build the Australian table grapes brand the DPI and ATGA arranged a retail promotion in 20 JUSCO supermarkets in southern China.

For the last two years JUSCO has conducted very successful Australian food promotions. For two weeks in March the premium retailer focused its promotion on Australian table grapes.

This was the first time that Australian table grapes had been promoted to Chinese consumers and the results were very promising.

Golden Wing Mau, a prominent Chinese import and distribution company, is one of JUSCO’s preferred suppliers and imported the fruit from Australia and supplied it to the 20 JUSCO stores.

“The promotion was launched in the Chinese media and 15 media outlets attended to celebrate and report on the entry of Australian table grapes to China,” Mr Balmer said.

“In each of the stores prominent point-of-sale material with the Australian grapes logo attracted consumers to the product while promoters gave free samples to consumers to let them experience the great taste of Australian table grapes.

“To entice consumers to purchase Australian grapes a koala bear gift was offered to repeat buyers.”

Mr Balmer said the promotion was very successful.

“About $150,000 worth of Australian Thompson Seedless and Crimson Seedless grapes were sold during the two week period.

“In fact table grapes was the largest selling product in the whole Australian promotion.”

Mr Balmer said the industry would continue to build on the successes of the 2012 season.

“However we cannot take this early success for granted. We need to work actively with our importers and retailer customers to build the Australian brand.”

Study tours are vital for growers and exporters to identify consumer demands and establish contacts in a new market.
Chinese fruit production increases

A report from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service shows Chinese fruit production has risen in the 2011/2012 season.

Among others, favourable growing conditions and better management have led to higher production of Chinese apples, grapes and pears.

Besides an increase of 9% in the Chinese grape acreage it is expected that production for 2011/2012 will rise by 8% to a total of 6.7 million tonnes. The total acreage is forecast at 600,000 hectares.

The farm gate price for Red Globe grapes reached US$0.91 per kilogram in 2010/2011, but fell to US$0.60 per kilo this year. The decrease was attributed to the increased production, which came a long way to meet the high demand.

Imports have risen by 27% compared to last year with the final outcome of 150,000 (short) tonnes. The strong demand for foreign grapes is met with fruit from Chile, the United States and Peru.

Last year the total value of US grape shipments to China was estimated at US$82 million, an increase of 19% over the previous year. This is due mainly to strong demand for (seedless) American grapes, which are regarded as high quality.

The total volume of Chinese grapes exported for 2011/2012 is estimated at 115,000 short tonnes, an increase of 30% compared to last season.

Table 1. Chinese grape acreage and production.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grapes</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<tr>
<td>Area (x 1000ha)</td>
<td>418.7</td>
<td>438.4</td>
<td>451.2</td>
<td>493.4</td>
<td>552.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prod. (mill. tonnes)</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>7.94</td>
<td>8.55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

NZ grape growers band together

Grape growers who grow their fruit for eating and not for wine, are banding together to raise the profile and production of the small industry.

They’ve set up a national representative body, the Table Grape Growers Association. Chairman Robin Janson says New Zealand imports $50 million worth of table grapes each year, mostly from Australia, Chile and the United States.

He says that raises issues of biosecurity and means customers are buying month-old grapes which lack the nutrients and flavour of those which are locally grown.

Dr Janson says the time is ripe for a revival of New Zealand-grown table grapes.

He says one of the issues that has faced table grape growers in New Zealand are summers that are not long enough, or hot enough, to get some of the traditional varieties of table grapes fully ripened and ready for market.

But Dr Janson says that’s changed over the last 10-15 years as newer more cold tolerant varieties have been bred around the world.

He says the association hopes to collate what types of grapes are being grown around the country and looking at potential imports of some of the newer, more adaptable varieties.

About 12 growers have joined so far.

Source: Radio New Zealand.

Events diary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 September 2012</td>
<td>Australian Prune Industry Association (APIA) Annual Conference, Gemini Hotel, Griffith. Contact: Dried Fruits Australia on (03) 5023 5174.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2012</td>
<td>21-25 SIAL Trade Fair, Parc des Expositions de Paris Nord Villepinte, Paris, France. Website: <a href="http://www.sialparis.com">www.sialparis.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 April</td>
<td>9 Dried Fruits Australia Annual Conference (incorporating the AGM for members and Growers’ Forum), Mildura Golf Club, Mildura. Contact: Dried Fruits Australia on (03) 5023 5174.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 December</td>
<td>7th International Table Grape Symposium, Australia. Contact: David Oag, DEEDI on +61 427427517, Email: <a href="mailto:david.oag@deedi.qld.gov.au">david.oag@deedi.qld.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 December</td>
<td>TBC International Seedless Dried Grape Producing Countries Conference, Cape Town, South Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 December</td>
<td>11-13 Sustainable Irrigation Conference, University of South Australia City West &amp; East Campus, Adelaide, Australia. Contact: Wessex Institute Of Technology Ashurst Lodge, Ashurst Southampton United Kingdom, +(44)-(2380)-293223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 December</td>
<td>21-26 IX International Symposium on Grapevine Physiology and Biotechnology, Santiago Chile. Contact: Dr. Manuel Pinto, E-mail: <a href="mailto:mpinto@inia.cl">mpinto@inia.cl</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you know of an event or industry meeting that you think should be included in the diary please forward the details to Paula Smith drpsmith@bigpond.com.
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Global prune production constant after poorer weather conditions

Global domestic consumption of prunes is slowly improving, probably as a result of the economic crisis, the general secretary for the International Prune Association (IPA) Christian Amblard announced at the International Prune Association (IPA) Congress held in Davis, California.

Exported quantities also appear to have recovered, with total sales in 2010 at 280,000 tonnes. Total supply in 2011/12, including stocks and new crops, is recorded at 350,000t.

Various prune crop shortages across the world, primarily as a result of climatic conditions, have contributed to stable production volumes, probably welcome news as overall consumption remains stagnant.

A particularly bad crop was seen in Argentina this year with just 15,000t available for sale. The country exports almost everything it produces, with a very small domestic market.

The country was in fact notable in its absence at the conference, which saw delegates from Australia, Chile, France, Italy, South Africa and the United States. It was unclear why the country did not attend. It also missed the Cape Town conference in 2010.

Australia, both a producer and importer country, has also had a difficult season and has reported availability of 4,500t in 2012.

Chile

Chile, unlike previously mentioned origins, has actually seen its current crop figures increase to 78,000t, although this was expected. Total supply should be around 86,000t. The domestic market remains very small, but exports are increasing. In fact, 2010 was a record year, with total sales at 67,312t, followed by 57,966t in 2011.

Pedro Pablo Díaz, from Sofruco, told delegates that the country has more than 800 prune growers, with over 15,000 hectares planted. The domestic market remains small, “although we are currently working on that”.

Developments include participation in a government healthy eating program, tastings and support through marketing material to improve prune consumption. Production for 2017, when younger orchards come into production, is expected to be some 100,000t. “This is not such big news: we have been expecting this for the last seven to eight years,” Mr Díaz said.

“What the Chilean prune industry is currently doing is technical improvements, marketing, public relations and working with the phytosanitary agencies, especially with Asia. In Chile we have produced a best practice manual for drying and
harvesting in the prune industry, and we always want to learn from California.

“It is a reality that we are going through tough times in terms of pricing. We are over-producing right now and the pulling programs from California and production volumes from Argentina still don’t improve the situation. Chile is trying everything to sort out the whole, uncomfortable gap,” he said.

In response to a question posed by FOODNEWS relating to Chilean prune exports to Argentina, Mr Diaz said he has not seen increased imports yet.

“At the moment, the Argentines are negotiating between growers and processors there to set a price for their own fruit, and that has not been successful yet. Once the negotiation is finished, Argentina will start trying to import fruit from Chile.”

France

In France, the internal and export market is rather stable, despite the ongoing economic crisis. However, relying on its protected geographic indication d’Agen prune to achieve higher prices is not enough, as production costs continue to spiral upwards.

As Dominique Bottéon from the Comité Economique du Pruneau explained, the Agen prune is facing a crisis on three levels: export market, domestic market, and at the European level.

“With exports, we have felt the impact of increased production from Chile and the depreciation of the dollar against the euro,” he explained.

“In 2004-06, we took advantage of low production in the US and exports recovered, but since then prices have gone down. Exports became less profitable and we focused on the domestic market, but then the market imploded and left some producers in a precarious situation. The situation should improve soon, although we may need some reorganisation.”

At a European level, Mr Bottéon explained that EU agricultural policy was set up to support farmers, and set a minimum price for the prune industry because of more expensive labour prices. However, a re-think of policies in 2007 has led to some uncertainty in the industry. French prune producers are now confident that by working together they will bounce back from the crisis.

Exact figures show that France had high stocks coming into 2011 at 33,738t, but its crop was rather small at 28,000t, giving an overall supply of 61,000t.

“The biggest emerging news is the benefits of prune consumption in the control of osteoporosis.”

United States

California, meanwhile, saw slightly lower production in 2011 compared with the previous two years. The internal market remains stable with exports increasing.

Donn Zea from the California Dried Plum Board, explained that prune acreage continues to fall in the state to around 20,604-20,008 bearing hectares. Prune tree sales reflect the reduced acreage, although there is an improvement of late.

“Carry-in inventory in 2011 was 58,967t (65,000 short tons), with total production of 119,748t last year, and an assessment for 2012 is ongoing. This creates a total supply of 178,715t for 2011. US prune sales are split equally between the export and domestic market, with imports virtually null,” Mr Zea said.

“The job of the California prune board is to look into domestic marketing, export marketing, nutrition research, production research and analysis of tariff issues etc.”

For the past three years, the California Dried Plum Board has tried to market prunes in the country as a ‘superfruit’ in order to drive domestic sales. Their target audience is currently women aged 25-54 and healthcare professionals. ‘Active’ marketing has also been used, aimed at athletes and those who are looking for ‘performance nutrition’.

“Competition is tough,” Mr Zea reminded delegates. “Consumers are now looking for very healthy products that are all-natural. We must remember to not produce as much, or just to promote better, or more.”

Australian representative, Jeff Granger said the research into nutrition was very encouraging. The findings of several American research scientists substantiated the claims that prunes are a ‘SuperFood’.

“Probably the biggest emerging news is the benefits of prune consumption in the control of osteoporosis.

“Laboratory testing has shown that prunes have shown signs of slowing the progress of osteoporosis, and have been proven to promote the replacement of bone tissue in sufferers,” he said.

“Further testing is continuing; however it appears that persons who consume prunes on a regular basis show far less signs of developing osteoporosis.”

Mr Granger said prunes had been challenged by other fruits over various health benefits. “The research proves prunes cover a broader spectrum of positive dietary health and nutrition factors than most other food types.

Three of the positive health issues are high in antioxidants, high in dietary fibre and reduction in bone loss in the elderly and increased bone development in adolescents.”

The continued investigation of health

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12
Prunes in the country are grown only in a small area near Cape Town, which produces a total prune orchard now looks stabilised. South Africa increasing to 35ha. 

“Argentina is difficult to analyse because they have so many disasters every year that you cannot consider every hectare planted in Argentina as a future bearing hectare. They have declared this year 15,250ha, but in fact at least 4,000-5,000ha are not productive at all,” Mr Amblard explained.

Jeff Granger, representing the Australian Prune Industry Association.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

benefits of prune consumption is a high priority for the industry, worldwide.

South Africa

South Africa, a smaller prune producer, was also represented at the congress. The country’s production is declining, despite good weather conditions. “You should note that South Africa does not contribute to the over-production in the world,” Dappie Smit, General Manager of Dried Fruit Technical Services, joked. South Africa was without stocks for the previous two years and sells everything it produces in the domestic market, importing any extra that is needed. Production is lower this year at 11,000t.

Prunes in the country are grown only in a small area near Cape Town, which means “any disaster is a disaster to the prune industry. To overcome this, we are trying to expand the prune area to the east and it is a means of increasing production,” Mr Smit said.

Very few new prune orchards are being planted and they are currently being replaced with other fruit kinds, putting pressure on production. The local fresh market is also taking more fruit from the prune industry.

The cost of energy and fuel is rising, but product prices are not, making it extremely difficult for the industry to survive. “We need to look at the countries where we will see population growth. India is still small, but is up and coming and we will have to look at incomes of consumers and where the middle class is coming up to sell prunes. We have also been discussing the possibility of Latin America, but growth is not nearly as much as Asia,” Mr Smit added.

Italy

In Italy, it appears as though consumption is rising, fuelled in recent years by increasing prune imports from the US, Chile and France. The country is a small producer, producing just 1,200t of prunes annually, mainly the Ente and Stanley varieties.

Fewer young orchards

Another area of interest to the delegates was total prune orchard area, since it often provides a helpful insight to future prune production.

“Young prune orchards across the world have decreased by 34%. This means that our orchard growth looks like it is slowing down and the total prune orchard now looks stabilised.”

“Argentina is difficult to analyse because they have so many disasters every year that you cannot consider every hectare planted in Argentina as a future bearing hectare. They have declared this year 15,250ha, but in fact at least 4,000-5,000ha are not productive at all,” Mr Amblard explained.

Australia has lost 240ha in the past five years, a decrease of 7%. The US has lost 19% between 2007 and 2012 and now has 24,038ha. Chile has increased its total prune orchards by 28% to 16,000t, France is up 5% to 13 816ha, Italy up 9% to 545ha and 6% less in South Africa at 458ha.

“In the past five years, the world total orchard moved by 0.7% only to 73,200ha, but the edges within this total are moving,” Mr Amblard added. “The evolution of the non-bearing orchard in the last five years has seen Argentina remain the same. They always plant the same quantities.

“Australia has stopped planting after high levels in 2007 and now has a low quantity of young orchards at 310ha. The US also lowered its plantings by 44% in five years to 1,800ha, and Chile is decreasing its young orchards; in 2012 there are 2,500ha young orchards remaining. France has increased its young orchard quantity by 62% to 2,100ha, with South Africa increasing to 35ha.

“As a total, young prune orchards across the world have decreased by 34%. This means that our orchard growth looks like it is slowing down. Young orchards represent 14%, so the total prune orchard now looks stabilised. During the past five years, we have seen 6,000 more bearing hectares, up 10% in the world, so this explains why we have some price problems in the world market,” he said.

Non-IPA member countries such as Serbia and Moldova are represented through FAO statistics to give a clearer picture as to what is going on. Domestic consumption, however, is harder to gauge.

“If you consider worldwide trade for prunes, IPA member countries represent 95% of prune production. We know there is production in the Balkans, central Asia but the qualities are not so high.

“We had contact with Serbia in 2008 to join IPA and we went over there and met representatives. We had good hopes for them to be members of the IPA and then unfortunately the international financial crisis hit and the effects were serious. They could not afford to enter our IPA. We still have a hope that they will join in the future,” Mr Amblard concluded.

Further information from the 2012 IPA Congress will appear in future editions of The Vine.

The bulk of this article was taken from a FOODNEWS article which appeared on 1 June, 2012 in Volume: 40 Issue: 22.
I’ve never won anything before,” she said. The Naismiths have booked their flights for the end of June and are really excited about the trip.

Sharon Naismith of Rosanna in Victoria will be munching her way to London as winner of the Munch-a-Bunch of grapes London promotion.

Sharon and her husband worked hard on writing the 25 word entry, trying quite a few versions before finally agreeing on the final wording and then presenting it in a spectacular hand crafted case that included cut out figures of a Beefeater and Australia’s Table Grape Ambassador Libby Trickett.

Australian Table Grape Association Communications Manager Allison McTaggart said there had been a terrific response to the competition with 86 entries sent in by mail and a further 779 entries online.

“We were amazed at the creative effort that people had gone to with their entries,” she said.

“We received some very creative artwork, including hand knitted grape bunches in red white and blue; a hand puppet designed as a velvet grape character; a bunch of plastic grape characters beautifully boxed with British flags and little ‘pick me’ signs and several booklets made using scrap booking techniques.”

Ms McTaggart said the competition was very close, but the winning entry encapsulated all aspects of the competition and helped wave the flag for Australian grapes.

She said pictures depicting a sample of the handcrafted entries would be on the Australian grapes website www.australiangrapes.com.au

Mrs Naismith was over the moon when told she had won the prize which includes flights for two people, five night’s accommodation and $1,000 spending money.

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The winning entry in the Much-a-Bunch of grapes London promotion.
Asian in our sights

Market access initiatives continue to play a prominent role for the Australian Table Grape Association (ATGA). A major project that has just completed is the Japanese cold disinfestation verification trials. This trail was completed by Francis De Lima at the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA).

The Japanese requested the trials be conducted on Mediterranean fruit fly, and if successful will allow market access into the Philippines for three varieties – Thomson Seedless, Crimson Seedless and Red Globe.

A cost benefit on the project was conducted prior to commencement of the project. Based on assumptions that the average price expected for Australian grapes would be $2.95 per kilogram and total grape import market for Japan ranging between 11,000 to 14,000 tonnes and Australia’s expected market share of 10%, it is estimated that a total investment of $1.298 million (present values terms) will produce gross benefits of $2.12 million (present value terms), providing a net present value of $839,878. The project has indicated a positive return and a worthwhile investment.

A Japanese inspector came to Australia in May and observed the trials at important final stages. Dr De Lima has indicated that the Japanese inspector was pleased with the data presented to him. He will now take this data back to Japan for final verification and then notify Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, (DAFF) Biosecurity.

Hopefully, the Japanese will accept the completed trials and progress the finalisation of a protocol for access to Japan for next season.

DAFF Biosecurity is still waiting on advice from the Philippines and South Koreans as to the outcome of their verification visits to Australia earlier this year.

The Philippines indicated that the insect transit cold treatment was successful and we now wait for revised protocol conditions.

The South Koreans are still in their administrative processes for acceptance and a draft protocol to be presented to Australia.

A recent Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) study tour to South Korea indicated that there is a market for Australian grapes; however Chile will be our main competitor, as it is with other countries. Further information on this tour can be found on pages 36 and 38.

A key advantage the Chile will have in South Korea is the rate of tariff they pay under their Free trade Agreement (FTA). It is imperative that Australia concludes its discussion with South Korea on our FTA as soon as possible to give us an equal playing ground.

Imports

On the import side, DAFF Biosecurity announced a non-regulated analysis of existing policy had commenced to consider a proposal to extend market access for fresh table grapes from California into Western Australia. The analysis will consider pests of regional concern to WA and will take into account risk assessments and reviews for Californian table grapes into eastern states. A draft report will be released shortly by DAFF Biosecurity.

Promotions

A review of the ATGA domestic and international promotional campaign will commence in July. The promotions committee will work with Horticulture Australia and review and assess the previous year’s activities.

The ‘Grape Escape’ competition attracted a large number of entries with some people devoting a lot of creative time in submitting their entries. The prize of a trip for two to the London Olympics had attracted the consumer’s attention as well as the in-store sampling activities in 500 supermarkets throughout Australia.

Industry Strategic Investment Plan

The work on the new Industry Strategic Investment Plan and Industry Development Needs Analysis is well under way. Interviews have been conducted with strategic stakeholders within the table grape industry and this information and analysis of the previous plan will be the basis of a draft document to be discussed by the Strategic Planning Committee.

In the coming months the draft plan will be presented to table grape growers throughout Australia at regional meetings for input and comment. Growers need to be aware that the new Investment Strategic Plan will be an important and significant document which will detail in priority how the table grape industry allocates levy funds in the next five years.

Incorporated in the plan will also be the industry’s marketing plans, both domestic and internationally and the industry’s communication plans. Once the plan has been finalised it then needs to be presented to the HAL Board for their acceptance.
Choosing the right agricultural or veterinary chemical for a job can be a tricky process. It not only requires accurate knowledge of a particular pest and its host, but also knowledge of the range of alternative agricultural chemicals registered for use, their mode of action, their formulation type and their possible effects on beneficial organisms and the environment. Mistakes can be harmful - and expensive.

Over the years, specialists in the area have come to depend on Infopest, an easily searched, comprehensive database of all approved agricultural and veterinary chemicals and Material Safety Data Sheets, originally developed and distributed by the Queensland Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (formerly DEEDI).

Infopest is now owned, managed and distributed by Growcom, a peak agricultural industry body based in Brisbane.

“Growcom has recognised the importance of the Infopest database as a reliable tool for the agricultural and veterinary industries,” Growcom’s Chief Executive Officer Alex Livingstone said. “We are committed to continuing this valuable work by maintaining and enhancing the benefits of the database for its customers at a reasonable price.”

Pest Management Industry Development Officer Janine Clark has used Infopest since the 2000s in her work in developing Growcom’s first Pest Management Plan for the horticulture industry and in providing access to approved chemicals for horticulture growers via off-label permits and label amendments.

“Infopest is unsurpassed in providing an easy and convenient way to find out what products are registered for particular situations, what pests can be controlled by various products and what information is on a product label,” Ms Clark said.

“At a glance you can see the list of products registered for a particular active, compare active content and formulation type, and the registered pack sizes,” she said.

“It takes just minutes to search, view and sort whole data sets of agricultural chemical listings allowing for convenient, easy and quick pesticide grouping, selection and rotation planning. The ability to search by crop, or crop groups, for registered and permitted uses is invaluable. Similar functionality is provided for searching by host or pest type.”

“The system allows you to cross-tabulate your results and produce reports that assist you with your record keeping. The new 2012 Infopest DVD contains more than 11,500 agvet chemical products and permits, all of which can be searched easily, the results cross-tabulated and reports produced to assist with record keeping.

“The Infopest DVD also helps primary producers comply with legal obligations by providing company supplied Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs), what to do in case of a spill, transport and storage requirements, personal protective equipment, toxicity information and potential environmental impact.

Infopest is still available in its familiar DVD format for ease of operation in remote areas where internet connections are not reliable. DVDs may be purchased via the website at www.infopest.com.au, or phone Growcom on 1300 367 911 or by emailing admin@infopest.com.au.
company didn’t need me anymore, so I went back onto the fruit block with Dad. It was only a few weeks later, though, that I finally did get the call from the ‘co-op’ and started in May, 1957.

“My first job was in the Mildura juice factory in Etiwanda Avenue, where James Trucks is now, and I started in the citrus side, putting cases of oranges in the hopper, nailing lids on boxes and so on,” Mr Sharman said.

“The factory did juice and cordial, but I also remember it producing tomato sauce and Worcestershire sauce – it used the knobs out of currants as a base for the Worcestershire – nothing used to go to waste in those days!” he said.

“Things were different then – the workplace was a lot different, for a start. I remember back during those early days we used trolleys on rail tracks to move fruit around the factory. Once, another fellow and I were pushing a trolley along the rails when I stood in a pit of boiling water that had been left in between the tracks. It stripped all the skin off my leg, and left me with permanent injuries. Those sorts of things were pretty common back then, but things have changed a lot now, thankfully.”

Mr Sharman’s colleagues and supervisors are quick to point out the remarkable work ethic and attention to detail that are the hallmarks of the company ‘elder’.

“I pack the fruit as if it is my own… I just think you either do things properly or not at all.”

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“I pack the fruit as if it is my own… I just think you either do things properly or not at all.”

With a natural gift for blending Geoff Sharman has been selecting and mixing dried fruit for over 40 years.
mate’s block as well, and in the past, truck driving and doing tractor work and vine maintenance on the properties of some “doctor and lawyer types”. Which, of course, meant more work to fit in around his full-time job – but he’s shy about the details.

“Well, I’m lucky in that I can sleep anywhere, on the ground, on a concrete floor, anywhere. And if I’m pushing to get the pruning done I’ll put a torch on my belt and work pretty much all night!” he laughs.

“People might think that’s a bit funny, but you’ve got to get the job done, and working at nights is the only way sometimes. I don’t even really mind the frosty nights that much. As long as I’m working I don’t tend to notice.

“I really do love the block work, still. I’m never happier than if I’m spending a weekend on the shovel doing the weeding or the watering.

“It’s (blending’s) a really important part of the production process, because how we blend the fruit defines how well we meet the customer’s needs, both on quality and cost.”

“My wife loves fishing, but that’s not me, and I’ve never played sport, so I’ve got to be doing something. I’ve always had some cows and sheep, there’s a horse, some birds, poultry, a couple of dogs...it’s like a zoo, and there’s always plenty to do.”

Mr Sharman’s expertise at Sunbeam is being used at the company’s Red Cliffs receival centre for what’s known as ‘blending’ – selecting and mixing various lines for specific orders, particularly exports orders.

“It was something I just found I was really good at, had a natural gift for, and I’ve been doing it for 40 years now,” he said.

“It’s a really important part of the production process, because how we blend the fruit defines how well we meet the customer’s needs, both on quality and cost.”

Mr Sharman’s 55 years of service with Sunbeam Foods was recognised with a small workplace presentation on his anniversary in May.

“I got a gold watch when 50 years came up, and I was happy for this one to just go by quietly, but it’s nice to be appreciated, anyway,” he said.

There are no retirement plans, but Mr Sharman’s forthcoming about his secrets to such a healthy and long working life.

“Coffee. I love it. I loved coffee before it was trendy! Always a double-shot,” he laughs. “And my other little secret is Worcestershire sauce – just a little nip each day. I read an article about a 103-year-old waiter, once, who said drinking half a glass of Worcestershire sauce each day was his secret. I took it to heart and it seems to be working so far!”

And no one at Sunbeam would argue with that!
Australian Premium Dried Fruits exhibited at the 2012 Mildura Field Days in May and found the two days to be a great opportunity to catch up with growers and display some of the new season product for visitors.

An information session on the new light coloured sultana type, Sunglo received a terrific response.

The sessions were held on both days and were well attended by many growers considering planting this exciting variety bred by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), but evaluated under local growing conditions at CSIRO Merbein. Growers paid close attention to a video taken at Henry Tankard’s trial patch of Sunglo. Footage was taken in fortnightly stages of the harvest season to record the development and drying of the crop.

This trial patch of Sunglo has been in production for five years and is an excellent source of information for growers interested in planting the variety. Mr Tankard said the Sunglo trial patch had produced on average 8.9 tonnes per hectare (3.6t/acre) over the five years of production.

After the video, Mr Tankard and Ivan Shaw provided a comprehensive commentary on the positive aspects of Sunglo which ignited some great debate between all attendees.

Dried Fruits Australia Industry Development Officer John Hawtin and CSIRO plant breeder Peter Clingleffer attended one of the sessions and added some valuable points.

The consensus on Sunglo was that although it is a late maturing variety, the resistance to poor weather and continuous number of fruitful buds made it a much safer option to plant than the traditional Thompson Seedless sultana.

**Quality awards**

Australian Premium would like to congratulate all of the winners of the Dried Grape Quality Awards at the field days. These were Doug and Jenny Eagle (Currants) and Michael and Robert Galliotto (Sunmuscat) for fruit supplied to Australian Premium along with Cos and Anna Piscioneri (Sultana, Raisins and Overall best fruit).

In the tough conditions experienced in the 2012 harvest, it was an exceptional effort for a grower to produce premium quality fruit and all winners should take pride in winning these awards in such a tough year.

**Minister visit**

It was an encouraging sign to see the Minister for Agriculture, Food Security and Water, Hon Peter Walsh attending the field days following the invitation of local member Peter Crisp.

Minister Walsh and Dried Fruits Australia Field Days Chairman Warren Lloyd spent time at the Australian Premium site discussing and tasting the Sunglo and Sunmuscat varieties on display.

It was a great opportunity to show the Victorian Agriculture Minister the investments being made into the dried fruit industry and some of the promising and positive aspects that are taking place at present.

Australian Premium would also like to thank the Mildura Field Days Committee and especially the work of Mr Hawtin for putting on such a professional field day and we look forward to attending this important local industry event in 2013.
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Apricot evaluation and commercialisation

A joint project application has been developed by Australian Dried Tree Fruits (ADTF) and the South Australian Fresh Fruit Growers’ Association (SAFFGA) which seeks funds to complete the evaluation of apricot seedlings produced by SARDI from crosses made in 2007 and 2008.

Recent state funding cuts have resulted in SARDI no longer being able to carry on this work to complete the program. Both ADTF and SAFFGA are committed to providing funds to ensure that this work can be completed and this significant genetic resource is not lost to the dried and fresh industries.

The proposed project aims to evaluate and commercialise the seedling resources of SARDI’s 28 year old apricot breeding program. Based at Loxton in South Australia this program has uniquely focused on increasing total fruit sugar levels, a key component of flavour, whilst retaining a traditional well balanced apricot flavour.

The seedlings to be evaluated are the final two generations from the breeding program, and are currently in their third leaf. Approximately 40% have set fruit, which is showing considerable promise at this early stage. No further crossings are to be made. SARDI has agreed to continue evaluating during the current (2011/12) season. It is hoped that this project will begin in July 2012 and run for three years.

A unique opportunity therefore exists for the ADTF and SAFFGA to identify and release to industry new and superior dried and fresh fruit apricot cultivars. The fresh market apricot industry in Australia is dependant mainly on imported Californian varieties. This reliance on attractive, firm and large but often flavour compromised varieties has resulted in a declining market share and widespread consumer dissatisfaction.

There are few options to address this problem effectively through importations. The dried apricot industry needs to develop new improved apricot varieties options to grow and sustain the industry. These varieties need to maintain a traditional style, improve overall quality and importantly improve the drying ration and thus net returns. Ideally, these cultivars should be capable of being integrated into mechanised production systems to improve industry cost structures.

Updating the DTF Production Manual

Australian Dried Tree Fruits (ADTF) is currently revising the *Dried Tree Fruits Production Manual*, with the aim of providing current and new entrants with a high quality reference document.

The revision of the production manual is part of a larger Horticulture Australia (HAL) project entitled “Industry development and extension for the dried tree fruit industry”.

To facilitate the revision of the production manual, ADTF has engaged a freelance journalist, Paula Smith, who is now working closely with the ADTF Management Committee and interested grower members.

A working session was held in Renmark on 7 June, 2012 and was attended by Management Committee members Kris Werner, Tony Loffler, Col Farey and local member Mark Greiger. Also present were Dried Fruits Australia’s Industry Development Officer, John Hawtin, and ADTF Secretary, Phil Chidgzey.

Mr Chidzey said the face to face session was extremely useful in enabling a thorough discussion, presentation of different views based on individual experience, and thus, suggestions for improvement.

Further working sessions and/or phone conferences will be conducted over coming weeks, to identify changes needed or new information that is required.

Any grower members who would like to contribute to this review process should contact Mr Chidzey on (03) 5023 5174 or email: pchidgzey@driedfruitsaustralia.org.au
Managing fruit set and bunch shatter in Sunmuscat

By Dale Unwin, Fred Hancock and Dr Karl Sommer

The dried fruit variety Sunmuscat is popular for its rain tolerance, but its poor flower to berry conversion is a drawback. The objective of this work is to improve berry retention, ultimately leading to larger yields and success for the variety.

Previous work (HAL: DG05002) identified the possible cause of poor fruit-set in Sunmuscat as being too much competition for carbon assimilates when the vine begins to flower, resulting in poor fruit-set. Cycocel® 77A (CCC) was identified as a chemical cincture that would potentially reduce vigour in the Sunmuscat grapevines during the flowering period and increasing fruit-set.

### Phenology

Previous research indicated that a Cycocel® application be made two weeks prior to flowering. However, this is difficult to predict for most varieties.

Data collected on the major phenological events over the first two seasons of the project indicated a time span of around 50 days between budburst at the tip of the fruiting cane (rolled on to lowest trellis wire) and flowering (Table 1). With this knowledge can assist growers to apply their Cycocel® at the optimum period before flowering ie, about 36 days after bud burst.

### Cycocel® (CCC)

The first season (2009/10) indicated that applying Cycocel® up to flowering increased berry retention. The second season (2010/11) data indicated an increase in berry retention regardless of the rate or that date of application (Figure 1).

Based on results from the first two seasons of the trial, lower rates of Cycocel® applied prior to flowering have the potential to improve berry retention in Sunmuscat.

### Current season

In collaboration with Dr Michael Treeby of NSW DPI the project team identified that lower rates of Cycocel® would be the target of the trial in the final season in conjunction with micro and macronutrient treatments. Inclusion of the nutrient applications were based on earlier trial results (HAL: DG05002) that suggested a beneficial effect of micronutrients such as boron and zinc combined with Cycocel®.

### Trial design

The 2011/12 trial design consisted of three spray rates of Cycocel® 40ml, 80ml, 160ml /100L of water (mix rate) with the ionic wetter Agral® used at 100ml/100L of water applied using a Silvan Turbomiser at approximately 700L/ha.

The trial design included applications of Cycocel® applied two weeks prior to flowering and at flowering (50% cap fall) to full rows of Sunmuscat grapes vines. In addition, four applications of micronutrients were applied to only one half of the vineyard on a weekly basis starting six weeks prior to flowering. The micronutrients and rates used for each application were calcium chloride 960g/ha, zinc sulphate 160g/ha, Borax 250g/ha and Agral® 400ml/100L.

### Field walk

The project team hosted a field walk on 9 December 2011. The field day was attended by 20 local growers and industry delegates. The project team spoke to the group about the work done so far and then walked the group through the current trial for the 2011/12 season enabling the group to observe changes in crop between each treatment combination.

### Results

Data collection in the current season will be completed when replacement cane internode lengths are measured post leaf fall. A field walk will be held at the DPI in Irymple to discuss results from the final season of the trial.

DG09002 - Managing fruit set and bunch shatter in Sunmuscat has been facilitated by Horticulture Australia (HAL) in partnership with Dried Fruits Australia. The project has been funded by the national dried grape research and development (R&D) levy with the Australian Government providing matched funding for all HAL’s R&D activities."

Dale Unwin is a Research Scientist, Fred Hancock a Senior Technical Officer and Dr Karl Sommer a Senior Research Scientist at Department of Primary Industries Victoria, Irymple.

Table 1. Days between EL stages of the Sunmuscat grapevine over the 2009/10 and 2010/11 seasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>EL 5 at Cane Tip</th>
<th>EL 23 Flowering</th>
<th>Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>10/09/2009</td>
<td>01/11/2009</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Data from the 2010/11 season illustrates the combined effect of rates for all dates. The data indicates a slight increase in berry retention with date of application, but there were no differences between the Cycocel® rates.
Prices high, a much bigger volume and quality OK

The 2012 dried grape season is winding up and although it will go down as being reasonable it could have been better. Sunbeam’s intake is more than twice that of the disastrous 2011 crop and the early season fruit was of very high quality. However, as reported last time, March rainfall led to the fruit browning off and for some growers of Sunmuscats an outbreak of bunch rot.

Overall the fruit is mainly brown, has good berry size and should meet most of our customers’ requirements.

Sunbeam is exporting containers of early harvested light sultanas and while these are meeting our European customers’ requirements they would have liked to purchase many more.

Light, golden, succulent fruit is the point of difference for Australian sultanas and these customers recognise this key quality attribute by paying significant premiums over the price of other sultanas.

The growers of this top quality fruit did a wonderful job in a very timely fashion and will be recognised through the Sunbeam 2012 Quality Awards. Watch out for a full review in the next edition.

Meanwhile Sunbeam has major marketing activities planned to make sure our local consumers know that there is plenty of good Australian sultanas, Sunmuscats, currants and raisins available again.

On the international front both the United States and Turkey report their crops are developing as expected and both have potential to be around 300,000 tonnes each. It is still some months to go before harvest and some risk is reflected in prices continuing to be firm.

Meanwhile locally Australian grown fruit is constantly facing very strong cost and competitive factors. Even with strong global prices all sections of the Australian industry need to be highly efficient to combat high labour, energy and transport costs and a highly competitive retail space where price pressure is constant.

Tree fruit

Dried tree fruit growers are encouraged to get more involved in their industry. Australian Dried Tree Fruits is a separate entity which contracts Dried Fruits Australia for its administration and secretarial service. Important activities occurring at the moment are the formulation of a strategy to best preserve and utilise the breeding stock of mainly apricot cultivars that growers funded through research at SARDI Loxton over the past 30 years.

Talks are ongoing with fresh fruit growers so that every opportunity is given to get the best outcome from this significant resource which is funded from growers’ Research and Development levies.

On another level the Dried Tree Fruits Production Manual is being updated and volunteers are needed to assist with its drafting.

Growers should get involved as the level of participation has fallen to a very small group in what is supposed to be a whole of industry representative body.

If you are interested please contact Phil Chidgzy of Dried Fruits Australia on (03) 5023 5174.

Prunes

Thankfully the water has drained off the sodden prune orchards around Yenda, Griffith and Darlington Point following their record downpours. There are some anxious growers who will have to wait until the spring to see if their trees remain productive.

The 2012 crop size is close to expectations and the quality is good. There still is a percentage of the crop that will fall into the small sizes where the market says it has little value.

As result growers should continue to review their crop and equipment management to minimise the tonnage of this size fruit that is presented to the dehydrator and subsequently goes into the grinder. In addition some high moisture fruit was presented at delivery and Angas Park will be focusing on this as we go into next season.

Unfortunately the international market is still showing depressed prices due to plenty of available prunes and further magnified by a strong Australian dollar.

Sunbeam staff

Many growers have known Richard Findlay over the past 7 years as Chief Operating Officer of the Sunbeam Foods Group. He recently took on a role more focused on Business Development and will still visit growing areas, but perhaps not as regularly.

Sherif Hassanein is now General Manager Sunbeam Foods Group and Supply Chain Director Manassen Foods Group and he has already been visiting Mildura and meeting with growers for some months.

Finally I am sure all readers will join Sunbeam employees in congratulating Geoff Sharman on 55 years of service with Sunbeam associated companies see this month’s industry profile story on page 16.

Sunbeam and Angas Park Dried Fruit Contacts:

Chris Ellis, General Manager Fruit Supply: (03) 5051 4403 or 0419 896 970

David Swain, Supply and Receivals Manager: (03) 5051 4402 or 0407 834 044

Colin Farey, South Australia Fruit Supply: 0417 875 149

Alan Lister, Field Officer: 0409 437 801

Gary Simpson, Field Officer: 0429 960 234

Barry Bottams, Field Officer: 0439 214 477

Steve Barty, Field Officer South Australia: 0417 838 908

Top working of new varieties

To facilitate the further expansion of the area planted to the two new varieties (Sunglo and Black Gem) Dried Fruits Australia has announced that top working can now be used to convert existing vines over to these new varieties.

At the time of the initial release of these varieties, and in an effort to maximise the bud wood available, the only option available to growers was the purchase of grafted vines.

Growers should note that there is a real risk of virus infection of the new top worked variety from the existing vine (interstock and rootstock). This may impact on graft strike rate and bring about a reduction of the cropping capacity and disappointment in the overall result.

Dried Fruits Australia is currently engaging a small number of experienced operators as licensed propagators to be available for top working of vines.

Growers are reminded that before any top working or purchases of vines can occur, they must sign a Registered Grower Agreement (RGA) and all top working must be done by a licensed top worker. RGAs will be available through Dried Fruits Australia or the licensed top worker.

Orders are to be made directly with the top worker who will make suitable arrangements with the grower and verify the availability of scion material. It should be noted that restrictions on access to bud wood may be imposed if demand for buds exceeds the expected availability.

While the cost for top working vines will be negotiated between grower and licensed propagator, it should be noted that the final cost will include $1 propagation royalty and a 30 cent administration fee for all successfully top worked vines.

Sunglo after rain from 28 February to 4 March, showed no signs of splitting.
Protecting bees: a guide for farmers and beekeepers

Farmers and beekeepers alike are being urged to get hold of a new guide aimed at helping them improve communication and work together to manage the risk to honeybees from farm pesticides. A potential shortage of more than half a million beehives needed for the pollination of our food supply is looming, and potential harm to bee colonies from pesticide poisoning is a key barrier to beekeepers providing more services for the 65% of agricultural production that is reliant on pollination by bees to produce fruit, vegetables and seeds.

The guide - *Honeybee pesticide poisoning – a risk management tool for Australian farmers and beekeepers* – was developed with funding from the Pollination Program, a partnership between the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL). It was written by TQA Australia, with assistance from the Victorian Department of Primary Industries.

Chairman of the Pollination Program, Gerald Martin, said one of the aims of the guide was to enable beekeepers and farmers to identify pesticides that are known to be toxic to bees, and to provide all relevant information on their use in one location. “Only around 200,000 of Australia’s 500,000 managed beehives are currently used for honeybee dependent crop pollination services. It is hoped that by making all this information easily accessible, both farmers and beekeepers will be encouraged to communicate and work together to maintain healthy bee colonies for pollination as well as honey production,” Mr Martin said.

“The guide also outlines good practices for farmers and beekeepers to adopt, and contains a number of useful forms, contact details and other relevant information,” he said.

Australia is fortunate to have a massive population of wild European honeybees that provide free pollination services, but if a bee pest such as Varroa mite becomes established here, these bees will be all but wiped out. “We know that if Varroa mite becomes established in this country 480,000 managed hives will be required to provide pollination services every winter and spring. This is likely to increase in peak seasons to 750,000 hives, far outstripping current supply. “It means we really need this valuable information to help beekeepers and farmers protect managed, working bees and our pollination services,” Mr Martin said.

The guide – *Honeybee pesticide poisoning – a risk management tool for Australian farmers and beekeepers* is available for free download on the RIRDC website at www.rirdc.gov.au/pollination. Users and providers of pollination services are encouraged to share it widely and are free to provide links to the guide on their own websites.

The Pollination Program is a jointly funded partnership with the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). The Pollination Program is managed by RIRDC and aims to secure the pollination of Australia’s horticultural and agricultural crops into the future on a sustainable and profitable basis. Research and development in this program is primarily to raise awareness to protect pollination in Australia.

RIRDC funds for the program are provided by the Honeybee Program, with industry levies matched by funds provided by the Australian Government. Funding from HAL for the program is from the almond, apple & pear, avocado, canning fruit, cherry, dried prune, melon, onion and vegetable levies and voluntary contributions from the dried prune and melon industries, with matched funds from the Australian Government.

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**Update on Prune IDO**

Following Peter Reynolds’ recent resignation as Prune Industry Development Officer (IDO), the Australian Prune Industry Association (APIA) decided to advertise and seek to engage a suitable individual or third party service provider to undertake this Industry Development project and provide a range of services to the industry. Expressions of Interest were invited to be submitted by late June.

As the Griffith region is now the largest prune producing region, this is where most industry development field activities will be focused. APIA anticipates that the successful service provider will be:

- Highly competent and have appropriate horticulture industry knowledge and experience.
- Located in Griffith, or able to commit to regular servicing of the area.
- Able to develop strong working relationships with all industry stakeholders.
- Able to communicate effectively, both verbally and in written form.

The IDO will work closely with the National Executive Committee and a project Reference Group to establish project priorities and implement an agreed work program. APIA considers that this role will require an average time commitment of one day per week. Flexibility will be required to ensure that industry needs are met.

At the time of writing, a number of expressions of interest have been received.
Remote sensing catches bees in the act

Surveillance cameras are a common form of security. However, their latest target is bees trying to sneak into the country through sea ports, potentially carrying with them pests and disease that could devastate the honeybee industry and food production.

The aim is to pick up almost immediately any foreign bees that enter so-called ‘decoy hives’ which are set up around ports and coastlines, and to reduce the cost and time involved for inspectors to regularly travel to the sites to see if there has been an incursion.

Experience overseas shows early detection is vital to dealing with foreign bee pests and diseases, as once they get established they are almost impossible to eradicate.

Dr Cheryl McCarthy.

The research project is being funded by the Pollination Program and undertaken by the National Centre for Engineering in Agriculture (NCEA) based at the University of Southern Queensland. The Pollination Program is run as a partnership between the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and Horticulture Australia (HAL).

NCEA Team leader, Dr Cheryl McCarthy, says field trials are now underway with a beekeeper near Toowoomba.

“We started by reviewing existing technology including off the shelf sensors for weight, temperature and humidity as well as the motion detection cameras,” Dr McCarthy said.

“We’re now working with the beekeeper to entice groups of bees into an empty hive set up with the equipment to see how sensitive it is. So far it’s working well with around a thousand bees, and we’re testing whether it can detect a hundred.”

The hive itself is on scales and there’s a bar inside it with weight sensors too. The temperature will change once bees move in, settling at 34°C inside the hive regardless of whether it’s mid-summer heat or freezing outside, so that’s also being monitored.

“Within the next couple of months we aim to have a site set up at the Port of Brisbane, which will help us to test the remote monitoring and allow inspectors to become familiar with the technology,” Dr McCarthy said.

“Eventually, we’d hope to have data from the decoy hives all over the country beamed back to a central location with inspectors monitoring for alarms from the office and only going out for a first-hand look if there’s suspicious activity.

“Even just seeing remote images of the hives will be an enormous boost to current efforts, providing a more effective early warning system.”

Australia to host 2013 IPA Congress

Analysis camera catches bees in the act

Australia will host the 2013 International Prune Association (IPA) Congress.

IPA President and incumbent Australian Delegate to the IPA, Jeff Granger said IPA meetings were conducted every 18 months alternating between the Northern Hemisphere spring/summer (May or June) and Southern Hemisphere spring (October or November).

“Australia was originally in line to host the 2013 congress, but offered the opportunity to Argentina, who is yet to host the international meetings,” Mr Granger said.

“However Argentina had significant crop failure in 2012 and has also fallen behind with their membership obligations with the IPA and as such will not be able to host the 2013 congress.

“As a result growers, processors and researchers from around the world will gather in Australia during the first week in November 2013 for the international meetings.

“This is a great opportunity to exchange information on production statistics, research and marketing programs, but has also become a forum for the exchange of international trade talks and dealings.”

This will be the third occasion that Australia has hosted the congress, having previously hosted the 1994 and 2004 events.

Mr Granger said the association was strong and was getting stronger because of free exchange of information and ideas and this would improve with changes to the membership qualifications.

“The IPA Executive agreed to change membership qualifications in an attempt to increase membership and allow a more equitable platform for all interested persons or groups to have a voice in the association.

“This will allow a number of large private packers, particularly in California to now take out full membership of the association. Previously only grower-owned co-operative packers or packers who were also growers were entitled to full membership (with voting rights at Annual meetings). Packers who were not also growers were entitled only to associate (non-voting) membership.

“The way has also been left open to marketing agents and machinery manufacturers to now take out Associate Membership and receive all correspondence of association activities including production and planting statistics from all member countries.”

Mr Granger said they were still in the planning stage of for congress; however it is expected that the formal conference proceedings and Executive and Annual General Meetings will be conducted in either Sydney or Canberra followed by a tour of the production areas with presentations from researchers. The congress will run for a full week.

Updates on the 2013 IPA Congress will be available on the IPA website and via the Australian Prune Industry Association.

Tenders for a new IPA website have been finalised and a Chilean website design will be launched a new IPA website in the coming months. The IPA website is www.ipaprunes.org
The National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) is representing Australian farmers at two global forums taking place in June.

NFF President Jock Laurie represented Australia at the World Farmers’ Organisation (WFO) General Assembly in Rome, while NFF Chief Executive Officer Matt Linnegar travelled to Rio de Janeiro for the United Nation’s (UN) Rio+20 where he acted as a negotiator for the WFO.

The NFF and the Federated Farmers of New Zealand applied for membership of international agricultural advocacy body, the WFO earlier this year.

The WFO brings together national farming bodies from across the globe to create policy and advocate on behalf of the world’s farmers - providing benefits to both Australian and NZ farmers, says NFF President Jock Laurie and Federated Farmers President Bruce Wills.

“Since the demise of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers two years ago, farm representation on an international scale has been at a crossroads,” Mr Wills said.

“This has led to ineffective representation for our farmers at key international forums, like the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Mr Linnegar said the assembly and the forum provided critical opportunities for Australian farmers to have their voices heard on the international stage.

“The WFO General Assembly brings together farm leaders from across the world to discuss key issues facing the agricultural sector: everything from trade to food security to climate change.”

“The WFO General Assembly brings together farm leaders from across the world to discuss key issues facing the agricultural sector: everything from trade to food security to climate change.”

“Three years ago, just under half the world’s population lived in urban areas - the UN predicts that by 2050, this will be 70%. This is a growing challenge for agriculture; not only for food security, but also for society’s understanding of food and fibre sources, production and sustainability,” Mr Linnegar said.

“Sustainability is also going to be a major focus at Rio+20. This forum brings together world leaders and thousands of other participants, including farm leaders, to discuss ways to help reduce poverty, achieve greater social equity and improve environmental protection.

“The role and contribution of agriculture are fundamentally important parts of these discussions, and it is essential that our farmers are represented in the negotiations. My role at Rio+20 is exactly that: ensuring that Australian agriculture can play its part in the global solution,” Mr Linnegar said.

The NFF has received support from the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to attend the WFO General Assembly in Rome.

2011/2012 annual wage review

Fair Work Australia’s minimum wage panel announced its decision to increase modern award minimum weekly rates by 2.9%.

The decision also increases the national minimum wage order by $17.10 per week to $606.40 per week or $15.96 per hour.

The decision takes effect on the first full pay period on, or after, 1 July 2012.

Dried Fruit Australia members will receive an updated Block Wages Sheet as an insert with this edition of The Vine. Further copies can be downloaded from the Dried Fruits Australia website www.driedfruitsaustralia.org.au

Import statistics

At 2,926 tonnes, total dried grape imports for the two month period March–April 2012, was well down on the 3,886t imported in the same period last year.

Much of this decrease is as a result of greater Australian volumes of fruit this season and significantly fewer sultana imports. During this period 1,470t were imported, almost half that of the 2,942t imported in March–April 2011. Of the imported sultanas, Turkey was the major supplier with 1,019t, followed by China with 380t.

Currants bucked the downward trend with this period’s imports (155t) more than seven times that of same period last year (20t). Since the introduction of import duties on Greek currants Greece is no longer the dominant supplier of currants to Australia, with 131t coming from South Africa during March–April 2012.

Similarly, Thompson Seedless Raisins (TSR) imports at 1,301t were well up on the 921t last year. Most of the TSRs came from the US (1,025t).

Dried apricot imports (746t) were a similar quantity to last year (761t), while prune imports (324t) were well down on last year’s 493t for same period.
Following the assessment of bud fruitfulness in the 2011 season, the Dried Fruits Australia Board approved the conduct of a similar project for 2012. Further to the standard assessment method of sampling only buds 5, 9 and 13, it was decided to include six samples from properties throughout the district with bud sampling along the whole cane. The properties were selected based on a range of results from last year’s fruitfulness assessments.

The majority of the canes were 17 buds long with all canes growing to at least 15 buds in length. This year’s results show fruitful buds are distributed relatively evenly along the length of the cane to bud position 15 (Figure 1, Table 1), after which the fruitfulness decreases.

All sampled canes had at least 15 buds, with only a few canes reaching 21 buds. Considering the indication of the bud distribution along the canes, growers should treat the positioning of the replacement of fruiting canes as normal and consider carefully whether there would be real benefit from rolling excessive amounts along the bottom fruiting wire.

### Chill factor

In the last few seasons, even though bud fruitfulness has been known, the full crop potential has not been realised as there have been a large number of buds that did not burst. Some people believe that one reason for the buds not bursting is that the vines did not receive adequate chilling throughout autumn and winter. However, others believe that this is not the case and that sultanas do not require chilling or receive adequate chilling to trigger bud burst.

This information may help growers with the decision to treat the canes to help break dormancy this season.

### Mildura Field Days

Dried Fruits Australia and Drying for Profit were present at the Mildura Field Days with a display in the Department of Primary Industries tent. Information sheets on the new varieties Sunglo and Black Gem were available for interested growers along with the Registered Grower Agreements (RGA) which must be completed and signed off by Dried Fruits Australia before vines can be ordered or top working can commence.

One of the highlights of the industry display is the cooking and tasting of pancakes filled with either Carina or Sunmuscat. This was a simple, but very positive way of showing how dried grapes can be incorporated into everyday recipe ideas.

The pleasant odours of cooking pancakes enticed field day patrons into the tent and to the Dried Fruits Australia display with a constant queue of people waiting for new batches of pancakes to be cooked. A special thank you to the pancake cooks, Kaye Grivec, Dinky Nichols and Linda Pollock.
The growing skills shortage in rural Australia poses a significant threat to the future productivity and profitability of primary industries and rural communities. The seriousness of the issue is highlighted by current research that points to a 35% gap between supply of agricultural graduates and demand for their qualifications, within five years. The attraction and retention of undergraduates has been identified as a particular, unaddressed problem.

Horticulture Australia (HAL), in partnership with the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation (RIRDC) is encouraging students to secure employment in Australian agriculture via The Horizon Scholarship program currently being funded by across-industry contributions made by each horticultural member industry. Formerly named Investing in Youth, The Horizon Scholarship seeks to promote careers in agriculture and address the shortage of agricultural scientists and industry professionals. Successful students receive a financial bursary, mentoring, leadership development and industry placement.

The Horizon Scholarship commenced as a pilot program in 2010 with Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) and the Australian Government supporting 10 students through their degrees. In 2011, the RDCs, government and corporate partners sponsored an additional nine students to see a total of 19 scholarships awarded to students looking to pursue careers in agriculture. Not only has the new undergraduate scholarship program been aimed at supporting university students, but also high school students who have an interest in the primary industries.

“Everyone I questioned said they would, or know someone who would give me a job, purely because I enjoy it and I’m young.”

Of the 19 scholarships, two were specifically funded via HAL for students looking to pursue careers in horticulture. In the first year of the pilot program Agricultural Science and Commerce student, Bonnie Hargreaves was awarded the 2010 HAL scholarship. Ms Hargreaves was mentored through the first year of her undergraduate studies by Plant Biology PhD student Dion Nicol, a postgraduate student at the University of Western Australia.

Ms Hargreaves travelled to Canberra to participate in professional development training in July 2010, and undertook industry placement at HAL’s head office in Sydney, gaining an insight of the complexities of the horticultural supply chain from research, growing, processing and packing, and marketing. During the placement, he spent time with Perfection Fresh gaining knowledge of tomato packing and blueberry production; learnt of pest and disease pressures and control measures from local Hortus agronomists; visited the citrus breeding facility at the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) research station and soil research trials investigating the impacts of crop rotation and nutrition programs; gained an understanding of the complexities of mixed farming operations at Abbotsleigh Citrus (suppliers to major retailers) and Sweet Sensations; and spent time with a local apiarist who services the Bundaberg region.

Mr Adams’ placement report to HAL stated the rising cost of inputs and stagnant returns as the biggest issue facing the industry. “This is a huge problem and I believe it will force Australian agriculture into foreign ownership and corporate owners, away from traditional family owned farms,” he said.

“Another key issue I found during my stay was the lack of young people in the industry. Everyone I questioned said they would, or know someone who would give me a job, purely because I enjoy it and I’m young. Whilst for people like me it is fantastic, for the industry on a whole it is very disappointing.

He was raised on a sheep and cattle property and completed his secondary education at Armidale School, prior to commencing undergraduate studies in a Bachelor of Agricultural Science at the University of Queensland. Whilst attending school, Mr Adams also participated in the Primary Industry Centre for Science Education (PICSE) Growsmart program – an initiative of the South Australian Riverland designed to address the growing skills gap and graduate shortage in primary industries.

Mr Adams undertook his two week industry placement at Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers (BFGV) to gain an insight of the various aspects of the horticulture sector. The key objective of the placement was for Mr Adams to gain a broad understanding of the complexities of the horticultural supply chain from research, growing, processing and packing, and marketing. During the placement, he spent time with Perfection Fresh gaining knowledge of tomato packing and blueberry production; learnt of pest and disease pressures and control measures from local Hortus agronomists; visited the citrus breeding facility at the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) research station and soil research trials investigating the impacts of crop rotation and nutrition programs; gained an understanding of the complexities of mixed farming operations at Abbotsleigh Citrus (suppliers to major retailers) and Sweet Sensations; and spent time with a local apiarist who services the Bundaberg region.

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“When we turn on the TV, how often do you see an ad to become a farmer? Or even a cotton harvester? A shearer or picker? Never. Why is this? Well mostly because it is ineffective advertising. People who want jobs in these areas know where to look, or at least start looking.

“Ideally, the seed would be planted right back in school when kids are malleable and open to new experiences. “Sure, few would become a Sidney Kidman, but at the very least it stimulates an interest into the flower or veggie garden with Mum or Dad. This then has the potential to develop into something useful to the industry, perhaps an interest in the slug on the leaves, or what happens under the soil surface. “I believe (young) people will always say no to something they know nothing about. They will generally stick to what they know, whatever they have grown up within the home environment. Thus the importance of getting kids on farms, playing with a veggie garden or worm farm. There may be an interest lying dormant under the surface.”

The Horizon Scholarship is an initiative of the RIRDC, in partnership with the following industry sponsors:
- HAL
- Meat and Livestock Australia
- Cotton Research and Development Corporation
- Australian Egg Corporation Limited
- Agrig8
- Woolworths - the fresh food people
- Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation
- DAFF
- Grains Research and Development Corporation
- Australian Pork Limited.

Applications for The Horizon Scholarship 2012 closed on 1 February 2012. Information on the program and future scholarships can be found at www.rirdc.gov.au/horizon or by contacting the Horizon Scholarship Program Manager, Margo Andrae, Tel: (02) 6271 4132. Email: margo.andrae@rirdc.gov.au

The 2010 and 2011 scholarships awarded by HAL were funded via the across-industry project AH09027. All horticultural industry sectors contribute to the funding of the across industry program through R&D levy and R&D voluntary contributions (VC) which are then matched by the Australian Government. In addition to the collaborative project investment undertaken through multi-industry funded projects, R&D project investment made through the program focuses on providing outputs that are widely beneficial across the breadth of horticulture.

Report showcases Australia’s world class plant biosecurity system

Australia’s plant biosecurity system is showcased in the latest publication from Plant Health Australia (PHA), the National Plant Biosecurity Status Report for 2011, which was released in Sydney at PHA’s General Meeting.

The status report demonstrates the lengths Australia goes to in a bid to protect Australia’s $27.5 billion agricultural, horticultural and forestry industries from plant pests. At the launch of the report, Dr Tony Gregson, Chairman of the PHA Board, said Australians tend to take our relatively pest-free environment for granted. “Because of our geographical isolation and the strong performance of our national plant biosecurity system, Australian producers don’t face the same pest problems that many other countries do. But we cannot afford to be complacent,” he said.

The National Plant Biosecurity Status Report lists the 300 high priority pest threats that could seriously reduce the ability to grow particular crops in Australia, or to sell our produce, should they establish here.

Keeping these pests out is not an easy matter with increasing movement of people and goods to Australia from all over the world. It’s a complex problem that requires a coordinated, national solution.

“Australia is fortunate to have strong cooperation between governments and industries to make such a solution happen,” said Dr Gregson. “The status report demonstrates this by describing the main players in plant biosecurity in Australia and the agreements that tie them together.

“The report also details the behind-the-scenes work that goes on: the major plant pest surveillance programs that are in place across the nation, the diagnostic laboratories and protocols we possess, and the hundreds of plant biosecurity research projects that scientists are working on.

“It’s an impressive array of activities that instills confidence in the security and viability of Australia’s plant production industries, as it should,” he said.

According to Greg Fraser, PHA’s Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, the report plays a very important role for Australian agriculture, horticulture and forestry.

“This comprehensive volume aids decision making and guides the deployment of resources and the application of risk-based approaches to biosecurity, making a direct contribution to preserving our valuable pest free status,” said Mr Fraser.

“It’s also very reassuring for local and overseas markets to see how much effort goes into maintaining our reputation as a producer of high quality food and agricultural products,” he said.

This year the status report also includes a section on Australia’s weeds of national significance and weed management. It contains case studies on biosecurity in forestry, collaboration on fruit fly identification, and transition to management projects for effective ongoing management of Myrtle rust, Asian honey bee and Branched broomrape.

Six weeks after the closing date for submissions to the proposed draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has released its revised draft.

The revised draft, along with several other documents, was sent to Basin Water Ministers who according to the Commonwealth Water Act now have six weeks to consider their response.

The document, called the ‘Proposed Basin Plan – A Revised Draft’, is due to be forwarded to Federal Water Minister Tony Burke by 9 July.

But with six months until the final Basin Plan is to be presented to Parliament (Table 1), the signs are not looking good with farmer groups and the Victorian and New South Wales Governments rejecting the plan.

NFF
Farmer and irrigator groups across the Murray-Darling Basin have united in their rejection of the MDBA's revised Basin Plan.

“It beggars belief that after 20 weeks of consultation where communities across the basin implored the authority to deliver a more balanced plan, there has been little substantive change,” National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) Chief Executive Officer Matt Linnegar said.

“We have said from the start that this plan should be about outcomes and not numbers, however what we have been delivered does not provide a clear picture on outcomes for the environment or communities.

“Worse still the means of getting to the prescribed number remains a blunt instrument and unless there is a significant and immediate shift in emphasis towards infrastructure and management solutions, the plan will bite deep for communities and families across the basin.

“The focus now must be on the recovery of water through non-purchase mechanisms including infrastructure and efficiency measures throughout the delivery system and on farm, environmental works and measures, river operations and smarter ways to deliver environmental outcomes that minimise the future impacts to the Basin's community.”

Victoria
The Victorian Coalition Government says it’s modelling has revealed the health of the Murray River can be secured using far less water than that proposed under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Water Minister Peter Walsh said the findings would save the Commonwealth up to $1.3 billion if they were adopted.

The Coalition Government used data provided by the MDBA to determine what the environmental outcomes would be if consumptive water use was reduced by 2,100 gigalitres instead of the proposed 2,750 gigalitres.

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Table 1. Expected timeline for developing the Basin Plan post submissions on draft plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 April 2012</td>
<td>Public submissions close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 April 2012</td>
<td>The authority to consider feedback and incorporate any changes into another version of the Basin Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 May 2012</td>
<td>The authority to present Ministerial Council with a Basin Plan, socio-economic impact statement, report on how comments have been considered and a Regulatory Impact Statement. The authority must prepare a document that gives a broad outline of any changes made to the proposed plan since the start of the consultation period, including a summary of submissions. It must be published on-line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 July 2012</td>
<td>Statutory 6 week period for Ministerial Council to provide comment to the authority. The Ministerial Council must provide written comments to the authority and indicate whether they agree with the SDLs or whether there are other modifications to the Basin Plan they would like. If no written comments are received then it is deemed the Basin Plan is accepted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 July 2012</td>
<td>The authority to consider feedback, to consult further and provide updated version of Basin Plan to Ministerial Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 August, 2012</td>
<td>Statutory 3 week period for Ministerial Council to respond to the Minister on altered Basin Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 September 2012</td>
<td>The authority to present Minister Burke with altered Basin Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 November 2012</td>
<td>Statutory 12 week period for the Minister to respond to the authority with comments in writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 December 2012</td>
<td>The authority to consider feedback, to consult further and provide updated version of Basin Plan to Minister. The authority must prepare a document that summarises submissions and how it has addressed the submissions. It must be published on-line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 January 2013</td>
<td>Statutory 6 week period for the Minister to chose to adopt or direct the authority on further changes. The Minister cannot direct the authority on matters of factual or scientific information. Nor can he direct them on specific mandatory elements in subsection 22 such as the methodology for calculating SDLs or changes in reliability from the Basin Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minister to present final Basin Plan in parliament.</td>
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Carryover review 2012

Since 2007 when it was first introduced in northern Victoria as an emergency drought measure, carryover has been a key tool to help water users better manage the impacts of reduced water availability.

More liberal carryover rules saw the spillable model introduced in the Murray, Goulburn and Campaspe systems in 2010 to minimise the water that individuals forfeit once allocations recovered. This gave all entitlement-holders – irrigators, urban water corporations, and environmental managers – more choice and flexibility to manage their own water availability across all years, not just the dry ones. As part of the consultation in the sustainable water strategy in 2009, a review was built into the decision to ensure the rules were working as expected.

The Carryover Review Committee was established by the Minister earlier this year to review how carryover is working on the Goulburn, Murray and Campaspe systems.

Victoria has moved into a wetter period and water storages have recovered after the long drought. We are now into the second year of these provisions, and with physical spills occurring in all three systems, it is an opportune time to review how the spillable water account provisions are working.

The role of the Carryover Review Committee is to provide advice to the Department of Sustainability and Environment on certain aspects of the carryover provisions from a range of perspectives representing entitlement holders in northern Victoria. Some of the things the Review Committee is responsible for considering are:

- Whether an alternative Murray spill indicator would be appropriate.
- The effect of carryover on allocation levels and the distribution of available water between different kinds of entitlement holders, and whether there are any adjustments to the rules needed on this score.
- Options to simplify the rules to make them easier to explain to entitlement-holders.
- Whether the spillable water charges achieve a fair outcome, and in particular whether they should be levied on the water entitlement-holder or the person receiving the spillable water.
- Publicly available information on the carryover rules, and on the range of other factors that influence water availability under different entitlements.
- The Goulburn system reserve policy, and
- Ongoing trade limits.

NSW secures $500 million for landmark water savings push

NSW Minister for Primary Industries Katrina Hodgkinson has also slammed the revised Basin Plan saying that it has not given due consideration to any of the issues raised in the NSW Government’s submission, which detailed a sensible and practical way forward.

“NSW makes up the largest part of the Murray, at approximately 56%, and stands to lose the most,” Ms Hodgkinson said.

The authority’s reduced SDLs are not based on the best available science, and will unnecessarily inhibit development in NSW.

“Research shows that there will be serious socio-economic impacts as a result of the basin plan on NSW communities and this is grossly underestimated by the authority’s own economic modelling.

New South Wales Minister for Primary Industries, Katrina Hodgkinson, announced that the NSW Government has received $500 million in funding from the Commonwealth Government for major water infrastructure projects across the state.

Ms Hodgkinson said the funding is part of $708 million of state-led priority projects agreed in-principle back in 2008.

“This $500 million will now be directed to four major projects led by NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and the NSW Office of Water,” Ms Hodgkinson said.

Ms Hodgkinson stressed there is no suggestion that funding for these projects will influence the NSW Government’s position on the Commonwealth’s Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

“I resolutely maintain that the draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan in its current form does not meet the needs of NSW,” Ms Hodgkinson said.

“The Liberals and Nationals have consistently argued that upgrading or installing infrastructure enhances the long-term viability of farming communities and industries.

“Infrastructure investments are the sensible and sustainable way of achieving the triple bottom line outcomes that ensure all social, economic and environmental factors are realistically addressed.”
What does efficient irrigation look like in 2012?

To find out what an efficient irrigator looks like in 2012 Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) staff have gathered stories from progressive horticulturists managing four properties within pumped irrigation districts of the Victorian Mallee.

The case studies aim to identify key success factors involved in on-farm management, and to explore the current realities of horticulturists in the northern Mallee.

Funded by the Department of Sustainability and Environment as part of the Sustainable Irrigation Program (SIP), the studies aimed to take a ‘snapshot’ of the irrigator community and to showcase irrigators who can both inspire their industry peers and provide insights for decision and policy makers.

The four stories in the study show the changes in both land and water use within the northern Mallee over time, and reveal the aspirations and motivations of these irrigators as they contemplate the next stages in the life of their properties.

These stories explore what successful and productive on-farm irrigation management in the Victorian Mallee looks like, developing insights which will both assist policy makers to understand the realities of irrigated horticulture production, and inspire other motivated irrigators with what is possible.

Working towards greater productivity

Research now tells us that irrigators who use drip irrigation and scheduling equipment do significantly better than those who don’t, and that drip irrigators achieve higher yields per megalitre and higher application efficiencies (ie. less through drainage and hence waste) than any other irrigation system.

The DPI stories confirm this, with improved productivity achieved by these irrigators through: their changing from flood irrigation to pressurised systems such as drip and sprinklers; the planting of newer and higher yielding crop varieties; greater knowledge and understanding of their soils; and their use of soil moisture monitoring equipment and specialised computer programs to schedule irrigations.

Irrigators on two of the properties stated that they had begun to make changes to reduce risks from unpredictable and extreme weather. These changes included: planting new varieties which were drought/rain tolerant and that mature at different times; and factoring evaporation from wind into irrigation scheduling. The irrigators on one of these properties also expressed their intent to “reduce the carbon footprint” of their property by using tractors as little as possible.

All irrigators were motivated to make change on their properties to maintain or improve their lifestyle, with others stating increased financial profit reduced labour drought and the personal challenge of working out how to make things work more efficiently were factors in their decision making.

None of the irrigators were motivated to make change just to reduce water use.

Key common traits

All interviewed irrigators had upgraded the irrigation systems on their properties since taking over. This change involved all moving from flood irrigation to the use of pressurised drip and sprinklers.

Three out of four properties had monitoring equipment (either automated capacitance probes or electronic tensiometers) to schedule watering, the irrigator on the other property used an augur to dig down and see how much moisture was there.

The irrigators on the three properties with monitoring equipment also had a good knowledge and understanding of their soils. They had had soil surveys done and made decisions based on these surveys.

Individual irrigation records (either electronically or in hard copy) were kept on three of the properties, with these irrigators recording details each day that they irrigated. One did not keep records and relied on the data collected and stored by Lower Murray Water. Two properties were current participants in DPI Victoria irrigation benchmarking programs.

All of the irrigators stated that government incentives and grants had enabled them to make the changes in their irrigation systems, and that this assistance allowed them to “change more quickly” and without it they would “cut corners”.

Dried grape grower Stephen Bennett was profiled in the efficient irrigator case studies. Photo courtesy of Anthony Clancy.
to other irrigators and DPI irrigation training also influenced their ability to change, along with membership in industry associations; internet searches (including using YouTube) and talking to local horticulture service providers and consultants.

‘Changed rather than less’ water use
All of the irrigators described water use on their properties as being “not necessarily less” in volume than it had been in the past. Most felt that they used similar amounts of water to that used by their fathers/grandfathers (two felt that their fathers had been quite efficient flood irrigators), but that they now had better control which resulted in healthier plants, increased yields and less waste and drainage.

The changed water use also had the benefit of opening up opportunities to grow crops that couldn’t be grown on flood irrigation. Changes in water use over time are illustrated in Figure 2.

Understanding soils
One of the main identified changes over time was knowledge about soils. It was thought that in their father’s/grandfather’s day the impact of soil type on yield, plant health and water use, and irrigation scheduling was not known.

The understanding this generation of irrigators had of their soils (water holding capacity etc.) was thought to be a significant factor in their ability to better manage their properties, although for some it made them question the wisdom of their forbears in choosing their property site: “there’s…a better understanding…of what we are actually growing in – as in the conditions…up until we did the soil survey I thought we had good dirt but then you put a back hoe into the pit and get the soil report back and you think

‘Why in the heck did they pick here? Why didn’t they pick a nice sandy hill somewhere…?’” (laughs).

This increased understanding of soils was thought to be driven in part by the requirement for a soil survey to be done to access government incentives and grants: “…to be quite honest if it wasn’t for the incentives we would never ever have done the soil samples and tests because we would not have considered that it would have been a beneficial spending of funds…but…It opened up our eyes…and the courses [training]…it was very revealing…it was a big step forward for us…to understand what was what and all of a sudden things made sense “

The irrigators also observed changes in their cultural practices as compared to the methods used in the past. These changes included: minimising cultivation on the property (no-till, less erosion from normal wear and tear); finding ways to cut back on the manual work required; reduced chemical use and use of different chemicals.

The nature of plant and equipment on the properties was also observed to have changed with increased mechanisation.

Advice for other irrigators
When asked the advice they would provide to other irrigators in the Victorian Mallee region responses included:

- Be business oriented and make sure your decisions are not just based on the imagined lifestyle of farming.
- Keep up with developments and come up to today’s standards - have efficient systems that allow mechanisation and automation.
- Talk and share with other irrigators.
- Participate in training and
- Be big enough to be able to employ people to do the component tasks in property management, so that you don’t have to do it all yourself.

The individual stories of these irrigators highlight the challenges currently facing irrigators in the northern Mallee, and reveal the aspirations and character of these irrigators and their approaches to, an often difficult, horticultural life.

Victorian Minister for Agriculture and Food Security and Minister for Water Peter Walsh recognised the irrigators participating in the study at the recent Mildura Field Days. He congratulated them on the work they had done towards greater productivity and water use efficiency.

Case studies involving table grape and dried grape growers will appear in subsequent issues of The Vine.
Chimenti Globe, the new Chilean table grape variety

Due to a spontaneous genetic mutation, a new table grape variety will be available in Chile and abroad. It’s the Chimenti Globe and is expected to have a high demand, especially in the Asian market.

Chimenti Globe was discovered some years ago in the vineyard of Alfredo Chimenti Agri, in Talagante in Chile’s Metropolitan Region. Alfredo Chimenti Agri propagated and followed up on the range for more than five seasons and his son Alfredo Chimenti Silva now co-ordinates a project that validates the genetic identification and prepares the new variety for the global market with international registration, virus cleaning and development of a business model for its commercial release. The project is funded by Chile’s Foundation for Agrarian Innovation (FIA), the Ministry of Agriculture.

After four years of work with a multidisciplinary team and the Agricultural and Livestock Service (SAG), in March 2011, Chimenti Globe was registered in the protected varieties registry.

This new variety is characterised by its pinkish-violet colour - different from the deep purplish-red of the mother variety Red Globe. The large sized berries never darken, no matter how advanced their maturity, and the pulp remains white. It is also sweeter than Red Globe and has smaller non-astringent seeds avoiding any feeling of dryness when eating.

The variety matures in early March in the northern city of Talagante in Chile. Chimenti Silva adds that the acidity and sugar in Chimenti Globe give the variety an extraordinary travelling capacity with excellent conservation in cold storage, so there are no quality problems when the product arrives at Chinese markets.

Compared to Red Globe, Chimenti has a smoother skin and has on average 3° to 4° Brix more sugar, reaching almost 20° Brix when harvested.

He adds that one of the great advantages of this new variety is the management.

“There is no need to invent or try anything new; the management is the same as the mother variety, Red Globe. “If a grower produces a very good Red Globe grape they will also produce a very good Chimenti Globe.”

Alfonso Yévenez is also involved with the project and said Chimenti Globe was an important opportunity to improve Chile’s table grape export business.

He emphasised the need to restrict supply of new varieties to ensure the best prices (upwards) in the target markets.

Presently the variety is being evaluated in several vineyards between Copiapó and Teno, with 12 producers adding up to a total of 25 hectares (grafts and new grapevines). 14 hectares also already exist in Talagante.

Chimenti Silva says that the strong production will happen in the 2013/2014 season, but that there will be a considerable amount of grapes during the 2012/2013 season for export.

Chimenti Silva said the new variety produced around 4,000 8.2kg boxes per hectare, and that quality was high with more than 90% suitable for export to the Chinese market.

Chile exports about 28 million boxes of Red Globe per year, of which 8 million are for the Asian markets. The Chimenti family expect Chimenti Globe to obtain 20% of market share, or around 6 million boxes.

Prepare for the future! That’s the focus of this year’s GrapeConnection table grape industry conference and all growers are strongly encouraged to attend. Scheduled for 30 - 31 August in Brisbane, Queensland this conference is aimed at getting you thinking about and preparing for the future.

The conference will include updates and presentations on topics such as:

- Packaging – what does the future hold?
- Increasing consumption – strategies and ideas
- Chemical access and pest update
- Mining – what you need to know
- Field tour of supply chain partners in Brisbane.

GrapeConnect Committee member Sue Allan said that the conference program was very attractive to early season growers and marketing partners, but the topics due to be discussed were relevant to all Australian growers.

“Everyone wants to grow their industry and plan for a more secure future.” She said.

“So we hope to see you in sunny Queensland in August.”

To reserve a ticket, contact Growcom on (07) 3620 3844 or Email: growcom@growcom.com.au.

For further enquiries please contact Sue Allan 0429 654 720.
How well do Aussie grapes compete in Asia?

By Simon Fraval

A recent study shows Australian table grape growers and exporters produce and supply quality fruit for Asian markets; however they cannot afford to rest on their laurels.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) study compared Australian, Chilean and South African table grape industries and their relative competitiveness in Asian markets. Factors assessed included: quality, understanding consumers, value chains and relationships, innovation, market access, cost of production, supply capability and logistics, marketing and promotions, understanding competitors, and economies of scale.

The study found that there are some obvious differences between the three countries. The quality of Australian table grape exports to Asia, exporters understanding of their customers and consumers and their ability to respond to supply changes was greater than that of Chile and South Africa, while Chile and South Africa had clear advantages in price, supply volumes, supply continuity and economies of scale as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Australia’s reputation for quality is driven largely by superior eating qualities, particularly sweetness. The Australian industry benefits from a close proximity to Asia which helps the industry deliver higher quality fresh fruit with good shelf life.

While this is advantageous for the Australian industry it is also a factor that Chile and South Africa are making improvements. Fruit quality from Chile and South Africa is catching up. Australian fruit exports to Asia cannot afford to rest on its current leadership in quality. Australian fruit not at its best will be out-competed by fruit from Chile and South Africa.

Chile and South Africa’s competitive advantage in price, supply volumes, supply continuity and economies of scale is a logical finding given there is a clear link between these factors. Large production volumes and scale contribute to Chile and South Africa’s very competitive pricing. Chile is the largest fruit exporter in the Southern Hemisphere with exports from South Africa increasing. However, stable production growth and export volume in Australia should not be immediately regarded as ‘poor’ per se, so long as the quality of the product remains superior to the competition.

There was little difference in the performance of Australia, South Africa and Chile in innovation, marketing and promotions and understanding competitors. Each competitor is continuously trying to improve their value chains. With regard to market access, Australia’s performance was considered to be better than South Africa, yet not as good as the Chilean industry.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the competitive profile of each of the competitors. It highlights the competitive strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats for each country’s table grape industry. It is important to note that a particularly high or low score should not necessarily be interpreted as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ as the industry’s market position and strategy needs to be taken into account for any overall assessment.

This research draws on interviews conducted with importers across Asia, as well as Australian and Chilean industry representatives. The findings from these interviews and research have recently been published by the DPI Market Access and Competitiveness team in a research paper titled: Citrus and Table Grape Exports to Asia: An Industry Competitor Analysis. A summary of the report is available via the DPI website www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/investment-trade/citrus-and-table-grape-exports-to-asia.

Simon Fraval is a project officer with DPI’s Market Access and Competitiveness team.

The price of grapes compared - $/kg averaged across all Asian markets annually. Australia is not always the most expensive in the market.
Asian export markets under the spotlight

By David Minnis

I last visited South Korea in 2006, and at that time it was a growing market for southern hemisphere table grapes with a strong preference for Red Globe. Over the intervening six years, imports have grown strongly with Chile and the United States dominating supply. However the market has moved to now preferring seedless grapes, in particular Thompson Seedless.

As a participant of the recent Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) delegation visiting South Korea and China, we came to the conclusion that the South Koreans like a green seedless grape because it is so different to what is grown locally. Local grapes are predominantly black or dark burgundy red and generally with seeds.

While in South Korea there were early local glasshouse red grapes on the market, variety Delaware, as well as plentiful supplies of Chilean Red Globe, Autumn Royal, and a few Crimson Seedless.

In the Garak market in Seoul, we saw mostly bunch bagged grapes from Chile, but in later meetings with importers there is also a place for naked packs as we prepare for China. None of the importers we met had ever eaten Australian grapes, so discussions always came down to the point of how can we compete with Chile.

My response was to say that the same situation applied to China where we have found that if we export the right quality to that market we can compete with Chile in some varieties, at least such as Crimson Seedless.

Early in our discussions with Australian Government officials the issue of the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Australia and South Korea was raised. We cannot stress the importance of an FTA if we are to commence trading in the next 12 months.

These FTA discussions have been going on for some years, but according to the officials we spoke to, are on the ‘home run’.

Chile has an FTA with South Korea and in 2013 imported grapes from Chile will only face a 4.1% import duty, whereas if we gain access for next season, we will start trading with an import duty of 45%.

If an FTA is signed between Australia and South Korea this duty could be reduced quite quickly.

The signing off on the protocol between Australia and South Korea to allow the entry of our grapes is also in the final stages. The cold treatment data that we compiled for Japan will mean we would be able to ship initially the three varieties - Red Globe, Crimson Seedless and Thompson Seedless.

I think there are some prospects in South Korea, but it is not going to be easy, particularly with the huge difference in duty between ourselves and Chile.

However Chile has its problems as well. It is four to five weeks sailing time from the market,
from mid season they have some outturn problems, particularly in their Thompson Seedless. The supply of Thompson Seedless is declining out of Chile because it is an expensive variety to grow, so if the strong market preference for this variety persists, then Australia, only three weeks from the market, has a chance.

However we need to get a premium to justify packing this variety for South Korea with its extra labeling requirements, AIDS costs, in-transit cold treatment costs and the requirement to bring a NPQS inspector out from South Korea to pre-clear the grapes.

**Shanghai market**

We flew down to Shanghai from Seoul to visit the market and talk with importers. Because we have had a much more successful export season in 2012 [see my comments on the season], we received considerable interest from the trade.

In Shanghai there are three wholesale markets, something I was not aware of. There is the small overcrowded Longwu Market, which is the main market for imported fruit and is near the container terminal in the duty free area on the Huangpu River. This is the dominant market in Shanghai, but it is very confined and can only allow 20 x 40 foot reefer to enter at any one time for discharge. Last year it processed 5,000 containers of imported fruit for the year.

The second government market is large, not as well placed to the river and appears to be poorly run and I assume receives little imported fruit.

The third market is a private market run by the Zespri importer who recently was sent to prison for 8 months for understating the import duty he should have paid on the New Zealand kiwifruit he imported.

Importers still buy the Australian grapes they sell in Shanghai from the Jiangnan market in Guangzhou. They had seen one container of legal Australian grapes come onto the Longwu market and a further two were expected. Most importers are interested in handling Australian grapes through the legal channels.

**Review of season 2012**

Let me provide a few of my own comments on the past grape season. Fruit quality was good with a much drier season than last year. Fruit maturity was early enough for Ralli Seedless and Crimson Seedless to be sent by air to Asian destinations for Chinese New Year.

The major early concern for growers was crop load with yields well down on all varieties on many properties. Crimson Seedless was consistently cropping at about 1-1½ boxes to the vine. Thompson Seedless crops were well down as were some Red Globe crops.

When it came to pick the fruit the bunches had filled out well and so bunch size made up to some extent for lower crop loads, particularly in Crimson Seedless.

"Chile has an FTA with Korea and in 2013 imported grapes from Chile will only face a 4.1% import duty, whereas if we gain access for next season, we will start trading with an import duty of 45%.”

Sugar levels were back to their characteristic best, for which Australia is well known. The Red Globe quality was the best for a decade.

**The markets in Asia**

Vietnam was a strong market all season particularly for black grapes. A possible complication for 2013 might be the arrival of South African grapes on this market for the first time. Indonesia with the threat of port closure in Jakarta was overloaded early with South African Red Globe, so sales of Australian globe were difficult. As the season progressed things improved.

Indonesia with the threat of port closure in Jakarta was overloaded early with South African Red Globe, so sales of Australian globe were difficult. As the season progressed things improved. Sales into Singapore and Malaysia improved once supplies of South African fruit eased in mid April. Quantities shipped to these markets are well down on what was shipped in the nineties.

Taiwan was a disappointing market for grapes as our high dollar made our fruit too expensive I would believe less than 1,000 tonne was shipped.

Thailand volumes were also down by 50% on what was shipped in season 2009 due to quarantine restrictions, rejections by AQIS at time of export, and the high value of the Australian dollar. Some importers switched to Chilean supplies.

In May when supplies from Chile dried up, there was a surge is late shipped Crimson Seedless and Red Globe. However total exports are unlikely to exceed 4,500 tonne.

This market may be more competitive next season if South Africa gains permission to ship to Thailand.

Fruit fly outbreaks again restricted airfreight exports to some markets such as Thailand.

The China / Hong Kong markets were strong in February and March and Australian crimson and globe sold quite well. The volume from Chile eventually crushed the market in late March and April, but the Chileans supplied Red Globe.

South Africa shipped considerable volumes of early white grapes and then later shipped a lot of Autumn Royal as well as Crimson Seedless which ate quite well. All their fruit is sold in 4.5 kilogram net wt cartons.

Australian supplies built up once Robinvale growers began picking some volume and as a consequence there was a spell of 3 weeks when Australian crimson prices were lower as the volume on the market was excessive.

Prices improved in May and overall the volume of grapes shipped to HK/China for season 2012 increased over the previous season.

This increase is important because the industry needs to be at critical mass to have some impact on the market.

In my view growers were more careful in what they selected and packed for China this year and this led to more price stability in the market. This trend needs to continue for Australia to grow the market.

David Minnis’ company Minnis Horticultural Services Pty Ltd (MHS) trades as 888 EXPORTS and is principally involved in the export of high value perishable horticultural produce. He represents the table grape industry on Office of Horticultural Market Access (OHMAC) and is a member of the ATGA Market Access Committee and Table grape Industry Advisory Committee (IAC).
Table grape mission to South Korea

By Stephen Baud

The Australian table grape industry is making inroads into South Korea as it prepares to gain official market access. Table grapes is Australia’s highest market access priority for the South Korean market and a draft protocol is due to be released from the South Korean Government in the next few months ahead of bilateral discussions in November 2012. It is anticipated that legal market access will be obtained at, or before the bilateral meeting.

In May 2012 the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) together with financial support from the Department of Business and Innovation (DBI) led a delegation of Victorian table grape growers, exporters, and industry representatives to South Korea. The market visit was an opportunity to meet with leading importers and retailers to develop an understanding of market requirements, identify consumer preferences for table grapes, and establish business relationships.

The findings from this mission will be a valuable input into the industry’s market entry strategy to South Korea when access is granted.

Market access

The status of the market access request for Australian table grapes to South Korea is at stage 5 (out of 8 stages) following the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry’s (DAFF) “procedures to lift a ban on prohibited plants and plant products”. The pest risk assessment identified only five key pests of concern, three of which are fruit fly species.

A verification visit of Australia’s table grape industry took place in March 2012 by South Korean Government officials. According to discussions with the Agricultural Counsellor, Joanne Pearce, this verification visit was largely successful. However, one issue raised by the South Korean officials was the allowable detections of Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM) which may be reduced and raised some concerns for the Australian table grape industry.

The protocol is released it will likely require pre-clearance inspection to be undertaken in Australia by South Korean quarantine officials. This requirement is consistent with Australian citrus exports to South Korea and will be in place for the first two to three seasons after access is granted, or until South Korean officials are satisfied the conditions of the protocol are being met. The cost of pre-clearance inspection must be met by the Australian industry which includes return business class airfares, accommodation and meals for the South Korean quarantine officials.

Australian table grape exports will need to be cold treated via in-transit cold disinfestation for sea freight or on-shore cold disinfestation for air freight. The number of days and temperature the grapes need to be kept below are yet to be determined, but will be outlined in the draft protocol.

Peru gained market access for table grape exports to South Korea in 2011 and are required to conduct in-transit cold disinfestation as part of its protocol. The temperature that this is undertaken is 1.1°C for 15 days or 1.6°C for 17 days.

Chile has also reportedly suffered from several isolated fruit fly outbreaks and was required to cold treat fruit. The specific temperature and days Chile is cold treating its fruit is currently unknown.

The progress towards ratifying an Australia-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) appears to have stalled despite Prime Minister Julia Gillard visiting South Korea three times in the past 18 months. The political appetite of the South Korean Government to sign another FTA so soon after signing the Korean–United States (KORUS) FTA which took effect in March 2012 has diminished somewhat. Consequently, DFAT remains confident that an FTA between South Korea and Australia will transpire soon, but are unable to give a specific timeframe.

South Korea has signed FTAs with a number of countries/trading blocks including the European Union, US, ASEAN, Chile and most recently Peru. The Chile– South Korea FTA which took effect in 2004 provided progressive tariff reductions for table grape imports from 45% in 2004 to 8.5% in 2012. If Australia is successful in its bid for market access for table grapes to South Korea, Australian exports will be subject to a 45% tariff in 2013 while Chile’s tariff rate will have dropped to 4.2% in 2013 and will be 0% in 2014.

Current market conditions

The volume of table grapes imported into South Korea continues to grow from 13,000 tonnes in 2005 to 45,000t in 2011. The composition of the imports is
dominated by Chile accounting for over 39,179t (87%), US 5,769t (12%) and Peru 240t (1%).

Peru’s peak table grape supply season is November-January with the vast majority of exports being Red Globe. In contrast, Australia’s supply window of January-May will compete directly with Chile’s production season. In addition to supplying Red Globe, Chile exports large volumes of Crimson Seedless and Thompson Seedless grapes to South Korea.

Consumer preferences for table grapes in South Korea has shifted away from seeded varieties such as Red Globe, which demand has stayed flat or declined to seedless varieties such as Thompson Seedless or Crimson Seedless varieties, which is growing rapidly in demand.

Of the seedless varieties there seems to be a preference for the Thompson varieties over the Crimson Seedless. Ironically, increased demand for Thompson Seedless is taking place against the backdrop of global reduction of Thompson Seedless plantings with anecdotal evidence of Chilean and US growers pulling out of Thompson vines.

South Korean importers expressed strong interest in potentially sourcing table grapes from Australia, especially if the taste, sweetness, stem colour, shatter percentage and shorter shipping times would result in a better eating experience for customers.

However, all of the importers were quick to question how competitive Australian grapes would be competing in the same supply window as Chile with our higher cost of production and tariff rates. There was a general level of scepticism among importers that the quality of Australian grapes is substantially better than Chilean grapes to justify the higher prices.

A number of importers suggested targeting upmarket department stores including Lotte Department Store and Shinsegae which sell high quality imported fruits in premium packaging and hamper sets.

Fruit sales in department stores are small volume/high price channels which could be suitable if the industry find they cannot compete against Chile in supermarket and hypermarkets where greater volumes are sold.

Several importers indicated they have the capabilities to conduct re-packing of table grapes for retail sales. Australian exporters can send 9kg polystyrene naked cartons to importers who can subsequently re-pack for individual supermarkets and hypermarkets.

E-mart (which is the largest hypermarket chain in Korea with 140 stores) indicated their support if the Australian table grape industry wanted to conduct a promotion of Australian grapes in its stores when it gets market access.

**Summary and recommendations**

South Korea’s growing affluence and demand for imported table grapes is rising year on year providing a positive outlook for Australian grapes when market access is granted. The dominant position Chile has with 87% of the total market share of imported grapes provides the greatest challenge to Australia’s competitive position given we will be competing in the same supply window.

None of the South Korean importers the delegation met with had ever tasted Australian table grapes before. Therefore there is merit in inviting out a selection of suitable South Korean importers to visit Victoria given that approximately 90% of Australia’s table grape exports are from Victoria.

A program that builds the importers’ knowledge and understanding and ultimately confidence in Australia’s table grapes would be a good first step to help address the scepticism expressed during the market visit.

South Korean consumers will also need to be convinced that the product offering of Australian grapes represents value for money given that they will be selling at a higher price point than Chilean grapes. The Australian Table Grape Association (ATGA) together with DPI could look at conducting retail promotions in selected hypermarkets, supermarkets and department stores to launch Australian table grapes in the market and build consumer demand.

The conclusion of the Australia– South Korea FTA will greatly assist the competitive position of Australian table grapes in the market, particularly if there is an accelerated reduction in the tariff rates.

Stephen Baud works for DPI Victoria as a Senior Project Officer Market Access and Competitiveness for the Korean Market.
The use of smart phones, tablet devices and social media is increasing across all industries and more and more applications are being invented for use in the agriculture and horticulture sector. While it may take a few more years for all phone users to have smart phones there is a real need for growers to make themselves aware of the new technology and how it can be used in horticultural businesses.

To facilitate smart phone use in horticulture the Murray Valley Citrus Board invited Steven Lorimer, Knowledge Broker from the Victorian Department of Primary Industry’s Horticultural Industry Network (HIN), to speak at a session for growers to learn about the new technology and its use in horticulture.

“Most farmers prefer to be outside,” Mr Lorimer said, “but in the past most technology solutions required them to spend time in the office to stay abreast of the latest news and market intelligence”.

“Today’s smart phone technology and the multitude of agriculture-related smart phone applications mean access to regular weather updates, newsletters and farming resources are literally in growers’ pockets allowing them to access information wherever they are.”

Mr Lorimer said today’s younger generation was already very tech savvy and relied heavily on their smart phones for so much more than simply communicating.

“They can find information, retrieve and share data, take pictures of equipment or plants that need attention and send it directly to a supplier or an agronomist for expert advice.

“All this can be done from the vineyard and saves a lot of time, particularly if further information is needed to make a diagnosis.”

Mobile technology is increasingly being used to help satisfy customer demands for information. Growers can make market decisions quickly and maximise returns by instantly sharing data or images of their produce allowing exporters to rapidly respond with market demand indicators.

Getting started

Many producers purchase a smart phone as they enter new contracts without necessarily being aware of the possible benefits. Many smart phones have basic applications, or ‘apps’ as they are called, pre-installed. This will allow the user to keep an eye on emails, keep dates and contacts, browse the web, monitor local weather and of course make phone calls.

But there are also a range of horticulture-specific apps to help growers.

A list of android, iphone, ipad and web applications that may be useful to those involved in mobile agriculture and technology is available on the Horticulture Industry Network, online resources library at www.hin.com.au/agriculture-applications.

“These applications are from all over the world and may not be necessarily relevant to Australian conditions,” Mr Lorimer noted, “but many are great examples of what could be available if demand existed.”

Some background information, such as the following, could be useful in helping evaluate the suitability of an application for your situation:

■ Price (You get what you pay for)
■ Downloads (How popular is it?)
■ Reviews (On balance has it got good reviews?)
■ Advertising (Is it commercial or does it contain lots of product recommendations?)
■ Data sources (Where does the data come from - government, university, commercial, unknown?).

Improving the link

Mr Lorimer said as the number of apps continued to grow the real challenge was to find those that met growers’ needs.

“Software writers need to be aware of farming needs to develop industry specific apps that they can sell, but unfortunately many farmers are unaware of what can be done using smart phone technology,” he said.

“Part of my role as knowledge broker is to connect these demands.”

Mr Lorimer said his research could help agricultural organisations and businesses make decisions on where to focus their efforts in the fast-changing landscape of mobile tools and on-line communication.

About 4,000 people braved the cold, but fine weather, to attend the 61st Mildura Field Days. The renamed field days have broadened their scope to allow exhibitors to show products and services relating to agriculture, irrigated horticulture, cropping and livestock and the results did not disappoint.

Field Days Coordinator John Hawtin said that while the exhibits were still focused on horticulture this year there was something for everyone – from the small hobby farmer, horticulturist to the large broad acre cropper.

“The inclusion of broad acre cropping meant visitors to the field days were able to see some large machinery including headers, self propelled boom sprayers and 8-wheel articulated tractors which were very impressive,” he said.

While visitors were keen to see the big ticket items, Mr Hawtin said many industries were still suffering financially and just didn’t have the cash flow for such items.

“However, there was plenty of interest in the smaller machinery and exhibitors reported strong enquiries over the two days.

“And the tool stalls were kept busy with plenty of people fossicking to get a bargain.”

Once again exhibitors went to a lot of effort to attract visitors to their site and this year’s winners for the best site awards were:

- **Large Machinery**: Haeusler’s, Mildura
- **Small Machinery**: Stihl Shop, Mildura
- **Large Commercial**: Matthews & Associates
- **Small Commercial**: Mildura Irrigation Repairs
- **Advisory Service**: Australian Year of the Farmer

Dried Fruits Australia had a site in the Department of Primary Industries marquee where it promoted the new dried grape varieties Sunglo and Black Gem and gave away fruited pancakes.

“The fruited pancakes taste fantastic and are a great way of showing how to incorporate dried fruits into favourite recipes,” Mr Hawtin said. “As a result they were very popular again this year.”

Dried Fruits Australia makes a much larger contribution to the field days than just free pancakes. Its staff provide management and administration support in the roles of Field Days Coordinator and Administration Assistant.

Other sponsors and supporters of the field days include:

- Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (for the use of the site);
- Mildura Rural City Council (for funding assistance through its Events and Festivals program);
- and TASCO Inland Petroleum (who provide the entry prize of a fuel give aways over the two days).

The committee was pleased to welcome Rural Finance as the new sponsor for the Dried Fruit Quality awards.

Although rain in the drying season made a lot of fruit go brown, some light coloured sultanas were produced prior to the rain and light coloured raisins and Sunmuscats were able to be picked between rain events. As a result of their harvesting strategies a number of growers did an excellent job of preparing the crop for harvest and this was shown by the winning samples of fruit. This year’s winners were:

- **Best sultanas**: C & A Piscioneri – Merbein
- **Best Sunmuscats**: A & T Galioto & sons – Robinvale
- **Best currants**: D & J Eagle – Coomella
- **Best raisins**: C & A Piscioneri – Merbein
- **Best overall fruit of the season**: C & A Piscioneri (sultanas)

It is a rare occasion that one grower wins two best variety awards, and even more special to win two categories and the best overall fruit of the season. Congratulations to Cos and Anna Piscioneri for an exceptional effort this year.

The committee expects that the new initiative to broaden the scope of exhibitors will take a few years to gain acceptance, but it believes that the event will increase in size as it caters for a wider range of exhibitors and patrons.

Already the have been enquiries from a local Dorper sheep stud and miniature beef cattle breeders and more enquiries are expected once it is known that the field days are not just exhibiting horticulture.
Following several days of successive rain, fully ripened Sunmuscats suffered severe botrytis damage in early March. The variety was fully ripe and generally had not been summer-pruned prior to the rain event/s, leading experts to conclude the outbreak was the likelihood of unfortunate timing, and not necessarily a ‘Sunmuscat problem’ with susceptibility. This hypothesis is supported by a few reports of severe damage to late sultanas, which possibly indicates that the worst damage occurred to fully ripe fruit, still attached to the vines and not in the advanced stages of drying.

Grower reports suggest that it did not matter if fruit was sprayed and cut, sprayed only or just summer-pruned just prior to, or immediately after, the rain; all Sunmuscats suffered botrytis damage. Many growers did not undertake preventative spray programs to control botrytis and unfortunately suffered losses.

There have been reports of varied results from growers’ botrytis control programs, ranging from full control to complete disasters.

To reduce the spore load at the beginning of the 2012 spring, growers should consider removing any mummified berries from the vines and where possible incorporate them into the soil.

**Botrytis sprays**

Following two years of botrytis infections, it is expected that there will be a high level of carryover spores in the vineyard.

To minimise any further outbreaks, growers must consider use of routine botrytis sprays in their disease and pest management control programs.

Botrytis is known as a brown or dead tissue disease, with the first opportunity of possible infection occurring after flowering where the botrytis spores attack the scar on the berries where the cap has come away. This spray should be applied at least at 80% cap fall, or better, at complete cap fall to ensure that all berries are protected.

As it is very difficult to cover bunches with fungicides, it has been suggested that to improve coverage, the air velocity of air blast sprayers should be reduced and that the spray be directed to the fruiting zone. Both sides of the developing vine canopy should be sprayed.

Fungicide applications at pre bunch closure and at véraison are suggested as the next important growth stages to spray to minimise the risk of botrytis. Because botrytis is an ‘opportunistic disease’ which infects damaged tissue, care must be taken to minimise damage and thus infection sites caused by powdery mildew, light brown apple moth and other diseases such as the relatively unheard of Alternaria until this last season.

Some experts have even said that no matter how well growers have undertaken botrytis preventative spray programs, if the conditions are conducive for botrytis infection, it will happen anyway, which does not give a lot of comfort to growers who have been hit with this disease two years in a row.

Dried Fruits Australia is undertaking a study of the known literature regarding botrytis and will be producing a fact sheet for dried grape growers prior to spring this year.

**Snails**

Snails seem to be the perennial pest for many dried grape growers. This is especially so for growers who trellis dry as snails are knocked off the vines along with the harvested fruit.

Consideration should be given to reducing vine litter and rubbish that will act as a haven and breeding sites for any snails present in the vineyard.

If snails are present in cover crops and mulch baits should be laid around vine butts and posts before the snails begin to move out of the protective litter and climb into the vines. Consideration may also be given to applying a chemical barrier such as copper sulphate to the vine butts in extreme cases of snail infestation.

It should be remembered that it is easier to deal with snails on the ground rather than when they have moved up in the vines and in fruit.
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