



Special Interest Articles:

- Market situation
- Shareholder wins award
- Graeme Thomas on water

Individual Highlights:

In the Markets	2
Stickers	2
Production	2
Hort Corner	3
AGM	3

The Fruit Company Limited t/a Natures Fruit Company

General News

Mike's Maelstrom:

He has done it again, or at least his daughter has.

Mike Clements is a grandfather again; a grand daughter born 19 March, weighing 7lbs 3 oz (or an equivalent amount in kilograms).

Congratulations to Mike and all the Clements clan.

Marketing Workshop:

Recently, NFC held its annual marketing workshop, with key agents from the eastern states attending a

couple of days in Victoria.

These sessions allow us to meet with the agents outside their normal territory and discuss matters of mutual importance, of which returns to growers, is just but one.

During the workshop, we had a presentation from Amcor on the research and development being undertaken in corrugated cardboard to facilitate pallet stacking of cartons of varying dimensions – a very informative address.

First Field Day of 2003:

Early in March we held our first "field day" for 2003. Graeme Thomas gave a very informative two hour evening presentation to growers from the Mildura area; this was followed by a social BBQ and refreshments. The next day was spent with Graeme going to a number of farms to provide information on the management of avocados in a less than subtropical environment.

(continued on page 4)

Steve Jeffers – A Man with Vision

The following is an extract from an article which recently appeared in the QFVG magazine – **Congratulations Steve Jeffers**

Sunshine Coast Avocado grower Steve Jeffers has achieved improved production through better irrigation management.

By monitoring his soil moisture levels through the use of an EnviroScan Steve has been able to give the right amount of water to the crop at the right time.

"Looking at the data on a regular basis allowed me to see exactly what the trees needed," said Mr Jeffers.

"By changing the irrigation volumes to suit the crop's requirements I was able to

achieve significant improvements in crop production, namely fruit quantity and fruit size."

He added, "It's shown me to manage irrigation is absolutely critical."

Mr Jeffers was rewarded for his efforts with the 2002 Water for Profit Irrigation Efficiency Award for the Sunshine Coast region.

Water for Profit is run by Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers and during the past four years has helped improved the water use efficiency of many horticultural irrigators.

Water for Profit field officer Matt Dagan said that spending extra effort on managing irrigation could lead to big improvements for

growers.

"Water efficiency isn't always about using less water, it's about getting the most production out of what water is available," said Mr Dagan.

He added, "There are a range of practices and tools that can assist farmers to get the best from their irrigation, Steve's case is an example of how small changes can produce excellent results"

More growers should follow Steve's lead – whether it is water efficiency or the efficient use of some other resource, greater efficiency adds to the bottom line !

See photo on page 2

In the Markets with Mike Clements



The last of the NZ Hass is moving through the southern markets, clearing the way for the north Queensland and Bundaberg Shepard crop to share the business in the avocado category.

The condition of the latest NZ fruit has not been good and this only damages the reputation of not only NZ avocados, but also Australian fruit.

The apparent lightness of the north Queensland harvest,

has helped maintain stable market conditions, with pricing fluctuating only slightly during March.

West Australia is still utilising their own avocados, although indications are that supply will dry up sooner, rather than later. Enquiries for NFC fruit, both Shepard and Hass are presently being addressed with a view to commencing supply in the near future.

The early Fuerte are enjoying good returns on an uncrowded Melbourne market, and we look forward to receiving Wurtz and eventually Sharwil and Pinkerton to supplement what will undoubtedly be a difficult supply season.

One label suits all

If
only



One Label Fits All – You Wish !

It seems that we might have a breakthrough with the application of labels or stickers.

Stickers are one of those consumables that have a definitive (read too high) cost, yet most of us would say, a limited, certainly hard to quantify, value.

One benefit of using stickers, clearly runs to the supermarkets.

For them, the data available from scanning fruit, which has a barcoded sticker, is extremely valuable.

At a recent meeting that Mike and Bryan attended with Woolworths, it was clear that there was likely to be some give in the previous hard stance on the use of specific stickers.

A generic sticker would be

fine – provided the colours were red and green.

Well the AAGF has come out with a suggested sticker – it has red on it !

Recent meetings with Coles suggest that they might also be accepting of a generic sticker (with red on it).

We live in hope.

Production with Shaun Peters

Production: The Nambour pack house has been sourcing fruit out of the Bundaberg, Childers and Sunshine Coast areas respectively, with early season Shepard and Fuerte being the predominant varieties supplied for packing. Fruit quality is of a high standard and size has been above average. Growers in the Sunshine Coast area are reporting excellent crops at this stage of the season and all things being equal the Nambour pack house is shaping up for an excellent year ahead.

Spray Diary: It is that time of the year again to start submitting spray diaries to the Nambour office and all

growers that have supplied their diaries prior to their first consignment being packed should give themselves a pat on the back. Those growers that have not handed in diaries for auditing can submit at a time that is suitable, but bear in mind that sooner rather than later is always appreciated.

Plastic Bins: It has become apparent during maintenance work in the off - season that a large number of our green plastic bins are being damaged. This may be a combination of carelessness by growers, transporters and pack house staff, or simply a case of age making the bins more brittle. Whatever the case may be the bins are

being repaired at a significant labour cost to your company and as such I would like to urge all growers out there to be a little bit more careful when handling the bins. I have also had talks with pack house staff and Turners transport regarding this matter.

If you do receive a damaged bin please make a note on your delivery docket when sending fruit in for packing, so as we can take the bin out of circulation and have it repaired.



Steve Jeffers receiving his award

Horticultural Corner with Graeme Thomas

Irrigation Management – Do you believe in it?

Earlier in the year I spent almost two weeks working around the avocado growers in Western Australia. The growers I visited were from above Gin Gin, north of Perth, to some new growers in the Albany region in the Great Southern region.

I am lucky enough to be able to go from orchard to orchard and be able to see the differences that management decisions have on the performance of the crop.

When you consider an avocado is a subtropical rainforest tree growing in a wide range of climatic conditions, there has to be some management decisions that will make or break the operation. Water management is the single most important factor that determines whether an

orchard is a success or failure. In the last 2 years in WA, I have seen in excess of 5,000 trees lost to poor irrigation management.

In WA, there are orchards within 5 kilometres of each other with very little difference in soil, water quality or aspect, but production varies from 2 t/ha to consistently above 23 t/ha. The only significant difference is the management of their irrigation.

Of the 40 plus growers I saw in the area, it was consistently those who paid attention to detail with their irrigation management, who were those who are consistently successful.

In our growing region the total dependence on summer irrigation is not the same as in Western Australia, but those who think that irrigation is not important, please think again.

Look at your yield. If your mature trees are yielding around 7 t/ha, (The Australian average) think again; you are not running an economically viable operation. You need to aim at 20–25 t/ha.

I do contract leaf and soil analysis interpretation for Casco Agritech, and in the process see a lot of results. When I see that growers use “Intuition” as their means of scheduling their irrigation management, I shudder. Intuition is a very poor scheduling tool.

The tree needs to be watered when it needs water, not when it is convenient for you to water it..

I find it disturbing the number of growers who have not had their irrigation system correctly designed. It is not uncommon to see good pressure at one end of a

(continued page 4)



Thomo's idea of irrigation and good water management

Annual General Meeting - 2003

This year's Annual General Meeting will, as last year, be held at the Oasis Resort, Caloundra.

Date: Fri 11 April 2003

Time: 4.00pm

A dinner will be held after the meeting, and we encourage as many shareholders as possible to attend.

You should by now, have received the notice and business papers, including financial and other reports.

If you have not received your papers, please contact the office.

At the AGM we are proposing to make further

modifications to our Constitution in an effort to:

- give the Board greater flexibility in distributing profits, and;
- help in cleaning up our share register and thus reduce compliance costs

If you are unable to attend the meeting, we would urge you to take a moment to consider the resolutions to be put to the meeting, and lodge your proxy form accordingly.

We also hope to have some interesting speakers, both at

the AGM and the Dinner.

We look forward to meeting you on the day, and being able to discuss any matters, which you believe, are of importance to you as a shareholder and grower.

AGM & DINNER
4pm
Fri 11 April 2003
Oasis Resort
Caloundra
Be seen; be there



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General News (continued)

A field day calendar should be sent out to you prior to Easter.

Addresses:

Most of us do not change our postal address unless we are moving our place of abode. However, it seems many people change their email address depending on the ISP deal of the moment.

These changes cause

difficulties for the admin and production staff when trying to send emails to you. So if you are changing your email address, please email us both the old and new addresses so we can update our records.

Email or Snail Mail:

If you would rather receive documentation from NFC in electronic form (ie via email)

rather than on paper (ie via normal post), please send us an email with the subject heading:

“NO MORE SNAIL MAIL”

Help us to reduce costs and ease the burden on our environment.

Information, which statutorily must be sent on paper, will continue to be sent in that form.

Horticultural Corner (continued)

lateral and find very little water coming out sprinklers at the end. This results in very poor yield at the end of the row when compared to the start. On many occasions growers will make the comment that their irrigation system is not good enough to use fertigation. - In these instances you are not serious about running your business. It is the most important input and as an investment, will give you far higher returns on than you will obtain on the Stock Market or the bank.

During the last season I had one grower who was not willing to pay over \$600/L and I would estimate needed a further 8 ML/ha to maximise his yield. The result was approximately 6 t/ha. The surrounding growers with good water management averaged 22-27 t/ha. You may say

\$4800/ha is a lot to pay for water, but from that investment the gross margin will change from \$-4,300/ha to \$17,400/ha. Unless I am mistaken that is a little better than bank interest unless my bank manager has been keeping something from me.

Recently I saw the following quote in a Californian publication by a Dr. Ben Faber.

“Irrigation is the key to good farming and is more important than fertilisation. Get a handle on irrigation because many of the problems in yield and tree health, can be traced to over fertilisation and poor irrigation”

I could not agree more with the above comment.

With the effects of the drought, clearly to be seen in

many orchards, it is time for all to be addressing our water management. Trees may survive poor water management and in the years when rainfall is ideal, you may reach your potential, but during that season, so will everyone else, with a distinct possibility of lower prices.

I will feel very pleased if just one grower reads this and improves their water management. This will be a very small percentage, but I feel my time has not been wasted

All the best for the season.

Graeme Thomas

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