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Hazelnut Newsletter Number 13 – Autumn 2006

Presidents Report - by Stewart Deans

Welcome to Newsletter No 13.

I trust most of you are now well into harvesting this seasons crop as I am. Most areas have received good rains over the winter and spring so things are looking up.

Ovens Field Day

As I start this newsletter I have just returned from our field day in the Ovens valley and the HGA Council Meeting. I found a number of very positive signs for the industry emerging from the weekend at Ovens.

The first thing I noticed was the increased interest in growing hazelnuts as indicated by the large number of people attending the field days at both Ovens and Orange. The Ovens field day had representatives from Tasmania and Western Australia attending.

The second thing that impressed me was the professionalism of the new growers. Most of the new growers were talking about planting thousands of trees. They had usually carefully selected their varieties, spacing, irrigation etc. based on best advice and had a good idea of how they were going to market the nuts. The new planting we visited was very neat, well laid out, with good irrigation and the young trees looked very happy. The other thing I noticed was the impact of synergies of a number of growers in the Ovens area, which was pointing to the development of a grower cooperative in the area. I think this type of development is necessary for the industry to progress.

Positions Vacant
No experience necessary
Apply within

HGA Executive

At the next AGM planned for October this year I will have completed a two-year term as President and under the Articles of Association must stand down. Peter Wheelwright has indicated that he has heavy

commitments with his job and can not devote the time to the job to the extent it deserves. Vanessa and Clem Cox have also advised that they will no longer be able to take on the roles of Secretary and Treasurer.

I would therefore ask that members consider nominating for the executive positions. Experience in hazelnut growing is not necessary, the main attribute required is a willingness to volunteer an hour or so of your time a week and attend two meetings a year. Some experience with committees would be desirable along with the ability to negotiate outcomes and to develop and implement plans. If you think you may consider nominating for a position but would like to know a little more about the job then feel free to call any of the executive who would be happy to provide their perspective.

Council Meeting

Following the Ovens Field Day the HGA Council held its bi-annual meeting, the other meeting is held in conjunction with the annual conference and AGM. The following agenda items were discussed:

- Legal Entity
- Research and Development
- Web site update
- Budget
- Propagators Code of Conduct
- Handbook Updates and re-print
- Annual Conference and AGM planning
- Communications issues
- Newsletters and Field Days
- Strategic Plan
- Member Survey
- Promotional Material – Display Board update
- Wandiligong Nut Festival
- Sponsorships and Advertising

I think it is worth commenting on some of these issues.

Handbook

The most pressing issue is the Grower's Handbook, as we now have a number of new members who are awaiting a handbook. The handbook is out of date and we do not want to continue to run off additional copies until some of the material can be updated, but are also mindful of the need to provide new members with a handbook as soon as possible. The compromise resolution was that the updated chapters would be included in the electronic master of the handbook, which would then be printed as a small run without regard to formatting niceties. This would allow HGA to get the handbook out to members while developing a more robust solution. The longer-term solution will be a handbook issued as a CDROM and perhaps also on the members page of the web site, so that updates can be incorporated quickly and at lower cost.

Legal Entity

Tom McInnes provided the Council with a comprehensive paper covering the pros and cons of the various legal entities available to organisations such as ours. The bottom line is that if we were to change from a company (limited by guarantee under federal legislation) to an association (incorporated under state legislation) it would result in a saving of at least \$700 pa and significantly reduce the accounting and reporting liability while not forfeiting any benefits. The Council determined to put a motion to members at a Special Meeting in October. The motion would be to change to an incorporated association. Details will be posed to members in due course.

Web Site

The current web site is poorly structured and does not provide a good image for the HGA. The Secretary provided details of an offer to update the site, including the provision of a Members-only section and for the provision of easy management of the site in the future. The Council agreed to progress the update within the limits of the costs indicated.

Promotional Material

The HGA has display boards, which have not been updated for some time and are not structured in any logical way. It was proposed that the structure of the display boards be based on the new web site groups so that there is a consistent structure to promotional material. A draft web site structure will be issues to Council members for agreement prior to the new web site being implemented. This will then allow the display boards layout to be developed.

Budget

The estimates for income and expenditure were reviewed and the indications are that the HGA is in a healthy position going into the next year. There appears to be no reason for a change to members fees beyond that agreed at the October meeting.

Grower's Survey

The Council believe it is useful for members to have the best information on production statistics and so have agreed to a discount on membership for members completing the survey. There is a percentage of growers who are not members and a percentage of members who may not participate in the survey. We also know that some growers abandon their orchards for various reasons so it can be difficult to be sure what percentage of the Australian production is represented by the survey results; however, we think the results are very indicative of the state of the industry. The survey sheet has been re-designed to make it easier to complete and more useful for analysis. I would encourage all members to complete the survey. Instructions on completing the survey will be included in the Grower's handbook.

It should be noted that the HGA membership fees to ANIC are based on the value of production, so we have a legal and moral obligation to provide accurate and supportable estimates of production. The members survey may be the most reliable source of information available.

Sponsorships and Advertising

The Council has agreed to continue the policy of allowing paid advertising in the Newsletter and also to allow members to place one short hazelnut related advertisement (text only) in the Newsletter at no cost.



Wingless Grasshoppers – by Don Fraser

Many of us in the eastern states have been affected by the recent grasshopper plague. These animals appeared this summer at our place, which is just south of Queanbeyan in NSW, and proceeded to eat voraciously our vegetables and the foliage on our trees. The species that caused our problem is the wingless grasshopper (*Phaulacridium vittatum*). Many have wings, and seem to fly very well over short distances, so don't assume they are not the same animal! They also climb trees very well, which allows them to access the foliage. The picture shows two of these devils on one of our hazelnut trees, on 7th January 2006.

According to Dr Roger Farrow, who is one of our locals and is an expert on wingless grasshoppers, they

lay their eggs in small burrows in damp soil in autumn, and the young grasshoppers emerge in November. Conditions such as the recent drought and other factors seem to favour the grasshoppers. A natural parasite is a Nematode or small worm, which tends to keep their numbers in check in normal years. The wingless grasshopper prefers broad-leafed plants, which is why they cause so much heartache. Two larger grasshoppers have been present also in our area, but in smaller numbers - a clear-winged grasshopper (*Austroicetes*) and a yellow-winged grasshopper (*Gastrimargus musicus*). These do not cause the same problems as the wingless grasshopper, as they prefer grass to exotic plants.

Roger Farrow spoke at a recent Landcare meeting and suggested several countermeasures, including a fungus preparation called Green Guard. Organic farmers could use this instead of a pesticide. We ended up spraying a form of artificial Pyrethrum, which gets rid of them for about a week, requiring several re-sprays. If we had not done so, I am sure that our trees would have been decimated by now. If the plague continues next summer, Roger suggests that countermeasures should be started early, after the first, small hoppers appear.

Don Fraser is an Associate Professor at the School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering at the Australian Defence Force Academy with special interest in Digital Image Restoration.

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Nut Set Problems - by Jim Clement

Our grove of 400 hazelnuts was planted in July 1999, when the suckers were three years old (we had them held a further year in the nursery due to severe drought conditions in our area in 1998).

The grove is 25 rows of 16 trees each, 4 metre spacing between rows, 3 metre spacing within rows.

There are three blocks, each of seven rows, of Wanliss Pride main crop, and four rows of assorted pollinators – the mix of pollinators is good as we have the same varieties and ratios as in the ex-Rex & Jane Bean planting and as Peter & Helen Felder. We have recently planted some additional varieties to increase the spread.

The problem is nut set. Nuts form and examination of nuts early in the season (around November) show what I believe to be a kernel forming (see pic).

However, by later in the season (Jan/Feb) all nuts checked are blanks, with what appears to be embryo kernel that has dried out (see pic).

The grove is under drip irrigation, using Netafim 8l/hr pressure compensating emitters, so it doesn't appear to be a moisture problem. The initial soil test showed a pH of 5.9 and we have improved the soil structure by using a lucerne mulch since the spring of 2001.

The other possibility that has gone through our minds is chill hours. The grove is in a micro-climate that does not experience frosts (the lowest temp in 14+ years is ½ C) and winter maximum temps are in the range of 10-15 C.

We have just received the report from our first leaf tissue analysis which shows that Boron, Copper and Potassium are below the Oregon State University recommended levels and that Calcium, Sodium, Phosphorus and Zinc, whilst within the recommended ranges, are at the lower ends of the range.

Next step is, of course, boosting these nutrients in the plant tissue to see if the nut set problem is a nutritional problem rather than a disease or environmental one. I will report later as to whether or not the correction of nutrients has aided nut set.

If anyone has experienced similar problems could you please advise Jim Clement whose contact details are in the Associations section of the Nutgrower.

Jim did a follow up report of the CDA Spray Unit that was a little late for publication in the last newsletter. Jim reported that he used the unit in December with temperatures to mid-twenties, the speed of action of Glyphosate is temp dependent, after 5 days there were two 350mm wide strips of very yellow, dying weeds along each row of trees.

Jim says he is impressed. Light and easy to use, economic in herbicide {and as it is undiluted, unused herbicide can be returned to the drum}, fast and reasonably cheap - about \$160.

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Letters

Another great (Summer) newsletter by the HGA team, thank you.

There is one unfortunately misleading "Editor's Note" at the end that states that "Glyphosate is not registered for use on hazelnuts" & recommends Basta. I have no difficulty with the recommendation, but beg to differ re the status of Glyphosate. Glyphosate has the same status as Basta - it is registered for general use on nut trees/plantations (although without mentioning hazelnuts specifically). Equally, the HGA website lists Glyphosate specifically for weed control on hazelnuts. The mention of Basta on the web-site in the separate list of chemicals specifically registered for use on hazelnuts is, I believe, incorrect - Basta's registration is for tree nut plantations generally, not hazelnut specific. The 'bottom line', though, is that both Basta AND Glyphosate are properly registered and quite legal for use in hazelnut groves. Suggest clarification in the next newsletter. (I am sure there was a one-page handout on this issue mailed out a couple of years ago).

Regards,
Jim Gault

Thanks for the correction Jim. It is of course necessary to vary the type of herbicides being used from time to time to guard against herbicide resistance and Glyphosate may be a good option for that.

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R & D Committee Report – by Lyn McRae

Industry Meeting

Unfortunately, after further discussion and investigation, it was decided not to proceed with the industry meeting at this time. The main reason for this was that we felt the grower part of the industry has not reached a sufficient size to be considered a serious stakeholder in the provision of product to the Australian market.

Pests and Diseases Project

Lester Snare has now almost completed the project and hopes to have it ready in June.

Future Research and Development projects

The Committee is to meet in the near future to review our priorities. With our major projects coming to an end we should have the resources to consider new projects. The committee will develop a new list of priorities and this will be put to the Council at their next meeting.

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ANIC Issues - by Stewart Deans

The Horticulture Australia Council (HAC) (the agropolitical representative body for horticulture) in conjunction with Horticulture Australia Ltd (HAL) have developed a submission to the Senate Employment, Education and Workplace Relations Committee. The submission proposes measures to address the shortage of seasonal labour for the horticulture industry through the removal of restrictions on the importation of seasonal workers. The Executive Summary concludes with the following paragraphs.

□ *Unless the shortfall in seasonal workers is effectively addressed, our industry will not realize its full potential. Production will plateau and export opportunities remain unrealized. Investment will not reach its full potential.*

□ *We might actually take this a little further. If we do not have an environment that encourages ongoing investment then we will begin to lag behind productivity improvements made in other countries and existing export and domestic markets will be further eroded. We risk getting on a downward spiral that would be very difficult to get off.*

HAC has developed a submission to Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) supporting submissions by various groups to the Country of Origin Feasibility Study. HAC supports the mandatory Country of Origin labelling on food products and

indicated that consumers have a right to know where the food products originate. HAC suggest that compliance costs will not be as great as has been suggested and that consumers are willing to absorb the costs for the benefit of knowing where the food originates.

The following is an extract from the Nuts for Life (N4L) Newsletter.

The Horticulture Australia (HAL) Board has approved a change to their position on promotion of generic foods like fruit and nuts. They now consider the dissemination of nutrition and health information of generic foods to be “dietary information” and not in breach of the Food Standards Code so long as the information does not accompany a branded product. This liberalises the information we can provide not only to health professionals but consumers as well.

HAL advises

If the purpose of promoting the health benefits of the food is not directly related to the sale of product, but to impart information, then the communication is not ‘advertising for sale’ but ‘information’ and is therefore not subject to the Code. This includes, for example: general consumer material, website, public relations, health professional materials. However HAL still requires that this communication promoting the health benefits of food should:

- *Be reasonable ie not distorted, misleading or deceptive;*
- *Avoid alarmist overtones;*
- *Be substantiated ie referenced from or supported by independent reputable research;*
- *Be clear and easy to understand;*
- *Appropriately acknowledge that no single food alone can markedly impact health.*

All health claims should be considered in the context of the need for a total balanced diet. If the purpose of promoting the health benefits of the food is to target consumers with the intention of generating sales, then the communication is ‘advertising for sale’ and is therefore subject to the Code in relation to health claims ie restricted regarding any suggestions that a food or nutrient is good for health or can prevent, treat or cure a disease. This includes, for example: advertising, point-of-sale material/activity, anything containing reference to or connection with branded foods or food sellers. It, therefore, must not:

- *Include a claim for therapeutic or prophylactic action or a claim described by words of similar import;*
- *Include the word ‘health’ or any word or words of similar import as a part of or in conjunction with the name of the food;*
- *Contain any word, statement, claim, express or implied, or design that directly or by implication could be interpreted as advice of a medical nature from any person;*
- *Contain by name, or reference to, any disease or physiological condition.*

The ANIC Board meeting was held in Melbourne on 25 March. Plant Health Australia (PHA) provided an

update and clarification of the requirements and responsibilities of organisations signing up to the Biosecurity Deed with the Commonwealth Government. It appears that until an industry is showing \$20m in production value then there is little advantage to be had from signing a deed, and a lot of added costs and responsibility. HGA is not in a position to sign a deed at this stage. Apart from Macadamias and Almonds, the other Associations intend to wait and see how the process develops. There may be an option to seek coverage through an MOU with either Almonds or Macadamias but it would be complicated and probably costly.

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HGA Field Days at Orange and Ovens – by Vanessa Cox

Strong interest in growing hazelnuts as a commercial crop saw overwhelming attendance at two recent HGA field days.

In total more than 150 people – many of them prospective growers - attended the January and February days held at Orange, NSW, and the Ovens Valley, Victoria.

Principal organiser and research leader, Basil Baldwin, said the two days had represented HGA's final commitment to the decade long Hazelnut Variety Evaluation trials in South-eastern Australia.

The trials were funded largely by the Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC). Both Field Days highlighted the potential for commercialisation of the research results.

Mr Baldwin said the high level of attendance – 70 at Orange and 80 at Porepunkah – had been most gratifying.

At both Orange and Ovens, Mr Baldwin took parties through the RIRDC Varietal Trial Plots, and explained the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various varieties, and where they might fit into the Australian industry as either main crop or pollinizer.

Even non-growers were able to grasp the impact of nut size, shape, kernel blanching ability and flavour on saleability, thanks to a display of whole nuts and cracked kernels. These covered varieties, which had performed best in the trials – Ennis, Tonda di Giffoni, TBC, Barcelona and some of their pollinizers, including Lewis.

At both field days, delegates were provided with handouts providing a synopsis of results. Mr Baldwin said the research had yielded a lot of useful data still to be analysed. The final report is not expected until June 06; however, research outcomes as at 30 June 2003 can be found at <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/NPP/03-141sum.html>

Visits to the commercial operations of local HGA members put the strengths and weaknesses of varieties

into perspective, underlining the importance of new growers understanding the market environment before selecting what varieties to plant.

At Porepunkah, new growers Terry and Janet Carter said proven suitability of Oregon Barcelona to the local soils and climate, and proximity to a core of other Barcelona growers had been deciding factors.

Basil Baldwin at the Orange Hazelnut trial site

Rod Tuson, Mount David (left), and Terry Carter (centre) discuss establishment

Despite several years of unusually hot and dry summers, most of their 500 two year old trees had established well and provided focus for discussion on irrigation, establishment techniques, mulching and training.

At the other end of the production cycle, the farms of both Colin and Lyn McRae, Orange, and Peter Wheelwright and Sarah Guthridge, Porepunkah, demonstrated mature orchards and the equipment necessary to manage them and to harvest, process and market hazelnut.

At both farms the principals freely shared their experiences of various types of machinery, and their reasons for selecting a certain brand or design over another.

Sarah Guthridge demonstrates the Tonutti vacuum harvester vacuuming a row of hazelnuts after sweeping

Sarah Guthridge demonstrate a sweeper designed to fit on a mower and sweep nuts into rows for vacuum harvesting

Basil Baldwin discusses varietal trials at Ovens trial plot

Anyone who attended both field days, as I did, noted the clear interaction between soil type and growth. Planted in 1996 into alluvial river flat soils, the more vigorous varieties were much larger at the Ovens site

than the same variety at the Orange site. The two Field Days establish that Australia is on the brink of a viable commercial hazelnut industry.

HGA thanks NSW DPIR officers, Mike Robbins and Lester Snare for their expert contributions to the Orange Field Day; Jean Baldwin, Alexandra Tuson, and Sarah Guthergidge (and her ladies) for catering; and Four Jay Farms, Anyngo Farm, Mount Buffalo Hazelnuts and Hazeldore Farm for their hospitality.

The industry is indebted to RIRDC and Basil Baldwin, Lester Snare and Karilyn Gilchrist for the research.

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Field Trip Update –

The dates for Field Trips in Tasmania and NSW South Coast are to be advised.

Southern Highlands Field Day

A hazelnut farm field day is planned for Saturday 20th May in the Canberra region. We will visit three properties, starting mid-morning and finishing mid to late afternoon. Morning and afternoon tea will be provided at the farms and a light lunch will be provided at a country restaurant. The cost, to cover teas, lunch and advertising, will be \$20 per head. The proposed timetable is:

10:30 am – Meet at “Riverview”, 1173 Wallaroo Road, Hall for a tasty morning tea overlooking the picturesque Murrumbidgee River. Les and Robyn Beresford will discuss their hazelnut plantation, which consists of 1,000 trees that are nearly 10 years old. They have adopted the hazelnut “bush” approach, which is the natural form of the hazelnut tree, rather than the single trunk which is recommended for easy nut harvesting. Most of their nuts are picked directly by the public on open days, removing the need for special harvesting methods.

12:30 pm - Lunch at Gooromon Ponds Restaurant, which is a short drive from the farm back along Wallaroo Road. The lunch will consist of an open sandwich and fruit juice.

2:00 pm - Following a 30 minute drive, meet at Judy and Stuart Shand’s place, 1268 Bungendore Road, Bywong. Judy will discuss their preparations for planting a hazelnut orchard in the near future, including site selection, irrigation requirements and local government approval that they had to obtain.

2:45 pm – A very short drive along Bungendore Road takes us to Stewart and Dianne Deans’ well-established mixed nut farm in Bungendore. Stewart will discuss their philosophy of pruning hazelnut trees, found the hard way through experiment, talk about their harvesting methods and show us their netting strategy to deter cockatoos.

For catering purposes and to provide you with directions and a map showing the properties, please contact Don Fraser, on (02) 6236 3402 (AH) or

don.fraser@adfa.edu.au, if you would like to attend this field day.

MEMBER’S ADVERTISEMENTS

Members wishing to advertise in the Newsletter should contact the Secretary, Vanessa Cox.

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Press Release

The following article was released for publication on 17 March 2006.

The CSIRO is going nuts with Australian hazelnuts.

HGA has donated hazelnuts to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) for a study to help improve Australian health and reduce drug costs.

President, Stewart Deans, said the donation of freshly cracked Australian hazelnuts was made to support the Australian Tree Nut Industry's health education program - 'Nuts for Life'.

He said Nuts for Life Program Manager and Dietician, Lisa Yates, had asked the Australian Nut Industry Council (ANIC) for donations of nuts to support a new research program being undertaken by CSIRO Human Nutrition.

The research to be conducted by Associate Professor Manny Noakes will be the first of its kind for Australia, and will evaluate a comprehensive diet and lifestyle intervention program (CLIP).

The research will compare the role of a structured diet including nuts, and exercise with statin drugs in lowering blood cholesterol and weight, and ultimately heart disease.

Professor Noakes said that Canadian research had shown that a diet containing almonds had the same effect as a cholesterol lowering drug lovastatin, and it was hoped a diet containing mixed nuts would have the same effect.

Prof Noakes said the prevalence of high blood cholesterol in Australian cities had not fallen over the past 20 years and there had been rapid increases in use of prescription drugs to lower blood pressure and cholesterol.

She said lipid lowering drugs are the fastest growing therapeutic group, constituting a major cost for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. According to Prof Noakes, statins cost to the PBS between December 2002 and November 2003 - was \$806 million.

Once data from the trial on 30 participants has been collected, CSIRO will further develop the CLIP program for trialling as a community intervention program through General Practitioners.

Mr Deans believes the research will prove the benefits of eating small quantities of table nuts, including hazelnuts, on a regular basis.

"Hazelnuts are a source of nutrients, such as Vitamin E, folate, dietary fibre, healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats and are an important source of protein as in the classic Mediterranean diet.

"Most people do not realise how delicious fresh hazelnuts are, because most in Australian shops are imported and often past their best," said Mr Deans.

Mr Deans said the Australian industry is still very small compared to overseas industries, but demand for Australian grown hazelnut was showing healthy growth.

Late News

Discussions with HAL indicate that the manufacturer of Hammer will be modifying the registration wording such that the scope will cover all nut trees. Hammer may be useful as an additive to selective herbicides for control of persistent weeds.