

# APATA AVOCADO UPDATE

May 2008

## Welcome to the May issue of Apata's Avocado Update

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### Primor Update: John Carroll

On Thursday 24 April we advised and paid our final export payments for the season just gone. This then made public our final result, which at the time I expected would be very favourable.



Subsequent to this, fellow New Zealand Exporters have advised their final results, and indeed our results are strong. In fact, with proper, yet simple analysis, they are substantially stronger. But now is also time for a few reflective comments and pointers.

- Putting our returns by size across the industry average size spread, we have produced grower average returns somewhere between six and eight percent above the next best. We view this as significant in a year when returns are more modest, and it reflects the situation of two years back, the previous largest New Zealand crop.
- The size profile in our pool is larger than the industry average, which would make the "total value of our pool" that much higher again.
- Primor has marketed just under 30 percent of the New Zealand export crop, versus 25 percent in 2006/07, and 23 percent in 2005/06. In other words, between 2005/06 and 2007/08, both "big volume years" Primor's export volume has leapt by 40 percent, at a time that the industry average (which includes Primor's numbers) has jumped by 10 percent. In actual tray numbers, Primor's volume has increased between the two years by 223,000 trays, most of New Zealand's export volume lift.
- To sell "more for more" is not that easy to achieve, so we are delighted without getting carried away. The effort and importance placed into planning has borne fruit, and the aim to provide through our association with Apata, the best possible supply chain from New Zealand to the world is becoming a reality.
- Yet what we want most is a strong, sustainable industry. Despite a difficult exchange rate scenario, export returns are somewhat higher than two seasons back, and this bodes well for a larger volume future. Recent downward New Zealand currency shifts, while too late for the season just gone, are encouraging also.
- Our involvement in Avanza is important, and I would almost say critical for the success of our growers and our industry. As much as I have highlighted Primor's own performance in this article, the united way in which Avanza can develop and support key markets outside Australia is exciting. Avanza is a flower that is just only starting to bloom.

The supply dynamic for the next season is unfortunately down, and that means reigning in bigger plans and making the cloth fit. But it is a key time for growers to understand the importance of Apata's decision making with the next harvest.

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I encourage growers to play their part in supporting our export customers, the ones we want in volume years, but must sustain in the shorter times. And while the next crop is down, it is not as light as 2006/07. In fact it would have ranked as a big crop just five or six years back.

I am sure the export returns will speak for themselves this coming season, so please maintain your crop care to ensure we have as much fruit as possible available to key customers.

And remember, New Zealand is just one year away from four million export trays of avocados, and we want the best customers we can find. We already have plans now for how that might be managed, both within Apata (logistics) and Primor (marketing), such is the length of the outlook we must have to make a success of bigger and bigger volumes. We never want to compromise our product or service because we haven't planned well enough.

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### Avocado Services Agreement Update

The 2008 seasons Avocado Services Agreement (ASA) will contain a number of changes supporting our planned improvements, and is scheduled for release in June. You should expect Steve, Peter, Niko or Tony Snushall to be in touch to schedule an hour to step you through our 2008 agreement.

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### Crop Estimation

Avocado crops are notoriously difficult to estimate. You've probably given it a go and become discouraged when you don't get as close as you expected. But the reality is good crop estimation is essential to forming a plan, and the flow plan is the primary document that informs markets, customers, packers, shippers, harvesters and you when and how we are going to harvest, and flow of the fruit into markets to achieve the best results.

Included at the back of this Avocado Update is an estimation guide, and we strongly encourage you to have a go and use it. It may seem complicated at first; however the system is quick and gives a balanced well considered estimate of likely orchard volume. You can help us by supplying your results to your Grower Service Representative – they will be constantly updating a running estimate, which we use to plan the coming season.

The Avocado Industry Council (AIC) crop estimating committee currently estimates the total crop for this coming season to be around 2.7 million trays. This is slightly below the expected "off year" range, but is consistent with what we are seeing on orchards. If we do harvest 2.7 million trays over the 2008/09 season, this will be the country's third largest crop. Therefore stable, good returning markets will only come through commitment to export and following a well considered and understood flow plan.

Help us to help you get the best returns - have a go at estimating and call us if you need assistance. Our contact details are listed on page four.



## Apata Avocado Technical Update: Lindsay Heard

Avocado trees in a number of orchards are showing signs of flower bud development for flowering in spring, and on some trees in the blocks with no crop for next season, there are small numbers of autumn flowering emerging. This is not a major issue as generally in past seasons only small numbers of autumn/winter fruit has been set and carried through for harvest in June the following season.

Once winter approaches, the trees will slow and the flower buds emerge further down on the branch, with flower in September/October, and not in August as thought in previous seasons.

Please contact your Apata Field Representatives if you have concerns with trees that have high numbers of winter flowers. We can offer some management options for these trees.

Early leaf test results in the Bay of Plenty indicate a range of Nitrogen and Potassium levels. Orchards with very little crop this season and coming into the "ON" year for fruitset need to have their nutrient status by leaf and soil testing, and adjustments can be made to the fertiliser programme in May or early-June.

To help alleviate the biennial bearing in avocados, trees need to have good reserves for flowering and to promote an early new shoot flush past the flowers. The new shoots (2009 flowering wood) need to initiate their flower bud development over summer for the 2009 flowering.

Young trees up to 7 – 8 years of age generally have good nutrient reserves e.g. good Nitrogen, Potassium, Phosphorus levels. They generally have good natural vigor to set new fruit then grow good shoot growth for the following season.

Older trees can set a large crop and struggle to grow a new flush and the result is poor flower bud development on weak shoots for following seasons flowering.

Flowering pruning and light centre pruning has been promoted as a tool for growers coming into the "ON" year to reduce flower numbers and promote more vigor-shoot growth in the tree for the following season's flowering.

Some orchards have low leaf Nitrogen, Potassium and Phosphorus leaf levels coming into winter and need to have corrective applications applied in May to early-June while the roots are still actively growing. Monitor the trees for leaf yellowing (especially in a cold winter) and apply foliar Nitrogen to maintain good leaf health over winter.

The high Six Spotted Mite pressure this season has caused leaf yellowing and yellowing around the veins of the leaves in some orchards this season. Six Spotted Mite can increase over the winter months especially in a mild winter, and monitoring trees over winter is advised.

We are unsure how the damage to leaves from Six Spotted Mite will affect the starch-carbohydrate reserves build up in the trees but we suspect we may see severe leaf fall pre-flower in spring. This is another reason we need to reduce flower numbers by branch/flower pruning so that the tree can set a good crop then grow a good shoot flush for the following season's flowering.



### **Insect Pressure**

Thrip and leafroller is still present in a number of orchards and in past seasons leafroller has caused fruit damage in late-May to early-June. On trees with good croploads, it's important to apply a good insecticide for leafroller and thrip going into winter. Apply Attack® or Lorsban® (**check for export with holding periods**) for good leafroller/thrip control. Apply Success® if leafroller is only present in the orchard. Monthly monitoring over winter for blocks with good croploads will suffice until early spring when leafroller moth flights start.

Maintain copper fungicide applications for trees with good fruit numbers for this harvest season. Also remove dead branches inside the tree as this is a source of fungal infection for the existing fruit and for next season's new fruit. Rain drops can splash the fungal spores, and then the fungal spores will settle on new fruit where they remain latent and cause fruit rots when the fruit reach the market place. Contact an Apata Technical Representative for help with spray management decisions.

### **Leaf and Soil Sample – Fertiliser Management Calendars**

It's time for the collection of avocado leaf and soil samples. The Fertiliser Management Calendars will be formulated for the next growing season through to April 2009. Boron and Nitrogen leaf levels in particular are important to monitor for next season's flowering, fruitset and new shoot flush.

Contact an Apata Field Representative to arrange leaf and soil sample collections.

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### **Apata Contact Details**

#### **Tauranga**

Turntable Road RD2 Katikati  
Phone: 07 552 0911  
Fax: 07 552 0666

83 Pyes Pa Road RD3 Tauranga  
Phone: 07 543 1211  
Fax: 07 543 0096

#### **Northland**

37 Southend Avenue Whangarei  
PO Box 1507 Whangarei  
Phone: 09 430 8003  
Fax: 09 430 8006

reception@apata.co.nz  
www.apata.co.nz

### **Avocado Services Contact Details**

#### **BOP Growers**

Niko Tahau 027 226 5489  
Peter Myson 027 200 9950

#### **Northland Growers**

Steve Brown 027 200 9954

#### **Technical Advice**

Jerome Hardy 027 233 4380  
Lindsay Heard 027 420 1544

#### **Local Market Information**

Jim Tawara 027 274 7076

#### **National Avocado Manager**

Tony Snushall 027 483 5699

#### **Grower Services Manager**

Bevan Bayne 027 511 6666

#### **Communications Manager**

Cassandra Thurston 07 552 0535  
027 500 8587

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