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CAN YOU BELIEVE IT 'S THE MIDDLE OF MAY?

We have had an overwhelmingly positive response to our "Fresh Rewards" incentive scheme and not just from growers (what 's that saying about imitation)! Most of the feedback has been that this new scheme is a big step in the right direction and recognizes the efforts that most growers put into presenting a high quality product for packing. We firmly believe that supply, quality and volume all deserve to be rewarded and should be rewarded independently of each other. Registration forms for the scheme have been sent out to all growers, If you haven 't received one let us know and we will get one out to you quick smart. If you have received it and haven 't returned it don 't delay...its in your best interests!

The last few weeks have been full on with both Persimmons and Mandarins ramping up in volume. The market conditions for Mandarins are proving to be a challenge for all of us although we should not necessarily be surprised by this as we have seen it all before. It maybe hard to fathom, but market volatility can be such that fruit packed on one day can be worth a whole lot less the following day. This isn 't anyone's fault its just market forces at play in an over supplied market. One positive note has been that the taste profile is the best its been for a long time and as a result we have been able to send a reasonable volume to Japan by both air and sea. With only a limited window we have to be able to hit the ground running and start shipping as soon as colour and maturity levels allowed.

Our UK customer for late season Satsuma's was in town this week and was very impressed with the crop that we have set aside for him. He was even more impressed with the fact that all of the growers in the UK program have attained GlobalGap status. This is due in no small way to the work done by Sally over the last few months and by the growers themselves. As the customer pointed out this shows yet another level of commitment to providing the UK supermarkets with what they want and will hold us in good stead.

Persimmons are also full steam ahead and Brian has been flat out dispatching fruit to all parts of the globe. As with Mandarins ideal growing conditions have given us outstanding taste and colour and our customers have been very pleased so far.

Ian



LEMONS

Over the last few months we have been through an extended period of low supply and the resulting the strong demand for anything that resembles a Lemon has kept grower returns at all time highs. Import volumes have also been down and this has also had a positive influence. We have however commenced our de- greening program this week and this will see volumes start to increase significantly. This may mean a slight reduction in prices in order to stimulate repeat sales. It should also be noted that imported Lemons are selling at around \$1.00/kg less than New Zealand fruit and although there are not huge volumes available, it is eliminating some supply points.

Our export program for Meyers is in place and we will start shipping in a couple of weeks to both Japan and the US. Returns are up on last year thanks largely to a weaker NZ dollar. I have been impressed with the crop that 's out there and can 't wait to get started.

It would appear Meyers are starting to gain a bit more mainstream popularity. A good example can be seen in the photo below which was taken at a large Trade Fair in Toronto last week. As most of you know Sunkist are a major player on the world citrus scene so it is interesting to see them looking at some of the niche products such as Meyers and Cara Cara Navels. This augers well for the near future when we could see Gisborne Meyer Lemon Volumes double, and it 's the reason we have started developing markets other than Japan.



When I was in the U.S.A recently I visited an upmarket retailer in San Francisco called Berkeley Bowl (www.berkeleybowl.com). They had no less than three different presentations of Meyers on display, conventional, stem and leaf and organic. In total there were eight different presentations of lemons available.



PERSIMMONS

We had a very early start to the season this year with the first fruit sold in the local market before Easter. The high prices that were achieved in the local market this time last month have fallen away as the supply has built up. We started to pack fruit for export on 23rd of April which was about a week earlier than last season. After commencing export packing, volumes slowly increased and we are now running a day and night shift to keep up with the fruit that is being harvested. The fruit we have packed so far has had excellent appearance and tastes great.

The good taste and appearance has helped create strong demand for our Persimmons in most of our overseas markets. Less Australian Persimmons in most markets has helped the demand as well and because the Australian product is usually significantly cheaper we have been able to keep our prices up. This season we have made sales by air to customers in Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. Sea freight programmes are about to get under way and we already have fruit on the water heading for Canada and Tahiti.

With sales prospects looking very good all I want for the next three weeks is fine weather! That 's not too much to ask after the atrocious weather last season, is it?



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SATSUMA MANDARINS

The combined production coming out of Gisborne / Northland is now hitting its straps and the market is now fully saturated with fruit. The chart below shows sales figures for the first three weeks of the season.

As you can see the volume being sold picked up very quickly and local sales are now hitting the 600mt per week figure (that's the figure that NZCGI has shown from the research as being able to be adequately sold on the local market each week).

I will update this as more info comes through and send this out weekly with the Mandarin Express.

		12 – 18 April	19 - 25 April	26 April – 2 May
Northland	Local	23,616	133,160	427,011
	Export		21,890	67,400
	Total	23,616	155,050	494,411
Gisborne	Local	31,180	77,358	178,355
	Export	2,670	2,480	23,040
	Total	33,850	79,838	201,395
Total Local		54,796	210,518	605,366
Total Export		2,670	24,370	90,440
Grand Total		57,466	234,888	695,806

*Weekly Sales figures collated by NZCGI

Last week saw the first “Real ” Satsuma promotions get underway in the market place, with both New World and Woolworths on promotion with loose Satsuma Mandarins. This has been a great help as it helps pull fruit through the market place into the shopping trolleys and onwards into fruit bowls around New Zealand. Fringe marketers have been offering very good deals (i.e. cheap prices) to get a slice of the action, and are more often than not undercutting prices and programmes we had organised weeks ago just to keep their fruit moving.

Prepacks are underway and are selling very well, this has really helped mop up all the fruit under 60mm that was packed this week that was not used for export. Keeping small loose fruit off the open market is imperative.

In store promotions are underway all around the country to increase the profile of NZ Satsuma mandarins. We have organised promotional activity with the key supermarket and independent customers which will carry on throughout the season, I can not reinforce how important this activity is especially in times like this when supply is outweighing demand. Pressure must be kept on the retailers to help move volume through the market.

We are in regular contact with the main Northland packer and they have asked their growers to slow up harvesting this week to get a bit more equilibrium into the mandarin supply=demand scenario. Hopefully this will help stabilise things somewhat as the season progresses, however they are less than 50% picked.

From what I can ascertain their quality has also improved significantly from last season and they are generating much less T2 fruit than last season or at least managing it better than last season. We have heard that harvesting in Matakana is expected to begin at some stage next week



LIMES

The relative scarcity of lemons this year so far has done wonders for lime sales, I am sure there are other reasons affecting the increase in sale of limes but this one seems to stand out. Limes seem to be flying out the door, thus enabling most growers free range to pick more or less as they want, however, prices are no better than previous years. This is to be expected though and most growers are prepared for it.

It is important that growers keep the product moving off the trees before they are either too yellow or become too big. Unlike other varieties where larger fruit demand larger returns, Limes are a luxury item that most customers prefer to purchase in the medium to large size bracket rather than the extra large. It 's pretty hard to get an XL lime into a bottle of Corona (or so I have been told!!).

With more lemons coming on stream as of this week, we may well see demand drop back slightly. Please continue to call me if you still have fruit to harvest so we can best manage the flow of fruit into the market place.

NAVEL SEASON PREVIEW

The Navel season is looming!!!!

Over the past week or so I have thoroughly enjoyed catching up with some of the early navel growers assessing crop loads and looking at all of the big beautiful fruit around. If I haven 't been to see you yet – don 't panic- everyone is on the list and I will be in touch within the next week.

From what I have seen it looks to be a great season so far as colour, maturity, size and cosmetics go. Wayne or myself will begin brix testing some of the earlier blocks late next week.

Reports from Australia have not changed much, we are still expecting to see a large crop of relatively small and cheap fruit coming in from Australia at the beginning of June through until November. This Australian fruit may have an impact on the marketing of the earlier varieties but as most customers will be running Australian and New Zealand fruit, the discerning public will have the choice of the two and hopefully show some loyalty to local produce.

For the later Parent and Washington varieties Wayne has been suggesting applications of GA (for delayed harvest) and many seem to have followed this advice so the earlier Australian fruit will hopefully have less of an impact.

Should any further developments come to hand I will pass it on.

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OUT IN THE FIELD

HARVEST BEGINS

As most growers are aware the Satsuma harvest is well underway and we are experiencing the usual problem of large volumes of fruit entering the market place this month. Growers who produce the early selections made a decision several months ago with regard to timing of harvest. GA was applied on several blocks to allow growers to delay the harvesting of these early selections. This strategy worked extremely well last season. Blocks that matured in April commenced picking and this high quality fruit was placed on the local market with key sizes being exported from suitable blocks. Brix levels on the majority of blocks were very good and this has enabled the marketing team to put together a solid export programme to Japan. Once again growers have put a considerable amount of effort into presenting us with quality fruit. And like last season the weather man provided us with ideal conditions leading up to harvest.

Local persimmon growers are also experiencing a positive start to their harvest programme. The next couple of weeks should see the bulk of the crop being harvested and packed. Fruit quality is very good with 'taste' being exceptional again this season. Due to some excellent growing conditions this summer fruit size on all blocks is larger than the previous season. To date we are only seeing minor issues of humidity marking on the fruit surface, and all growers are hoping for the continuation of this fine weather for the remainder of the harvest.

Lemon growers have also commenced harvesting fruit for de greening this week. Looking at the fruit in the field, and arriving in to the packhouse, it is obvious the standard of lemon our suppliers provide us has indeed improved over the past few seasons, and the extra effort growers are putting in the orchard is now being reflected in the final product. Well done.

Meyer lemon growers attended a meeting last week to hear about our marketing options for the upcoming season. I also highlighted the need for growers to monitor picking carefully so that fruit is presented in the best possible condition for selling. Here are some discussion points that were raised.

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LEMON HARVESTING

Discussion Points

- Before harvesting for de greening commences growers must be familiar with the minimum colour requirements. Fruit that is still 'hard green' will not de green successfully and must therefore be left on the tree for future picking.
- Growers need to submit Spray Diaries prior to fruit being packed. We will not be packing any 'new seasons' lemons without a copy of the relevant spray applications. These can be submitted by email to wayne.hall@firstfresh.co.nz or faxed to 863 0623.
- All lemon picking should be done into picking bags, not plastic buckets, as fruit dropped into buckets will be damaged resulting in quality claims further down the supply chain.
- Cotton picking gloves will reduce the incidence of puncture marks from fingernails and jewellery.
- Inexperienced pickers need to be carefully monitored to ensure they are clipping the fruit correctly. Fresh clipper cuts are difficult to detect on the grading line so it is important pickers are using the right technique in the field.
- Pickers need to carefully empty their full picking bags into the bins without the risk of dropping fruit.
- Growers are asked not to harvest wet fruit. When wet turgid fruit is handled the oil glands can be ruptured and the released oil burns the fruit surface causing oleocellosis.

BROWN ROT

The disease Brown Rot can be a problem in lemons, navels and grapefruit over the winter months if growers do not apply suitable fungicides as the fruit nears maturity. Cool, moist conditions will often result in severe levels of brown rot if fruit is not sprayed regularly. Spraying the ground underneath the trees, as well as the crop, also reduces brown rot infections.

Symptoms

Symptoms appear primarily on mature or nearly mature fruit. Initially, the firm, leathery lesions have a water-soaked appearance (see above), but they soon turn soft and have a tan to olive brown color and a pungent odor. Infected fruit eventually drop. Occasionally, twigs, leaves, and blossoms are infected, turning brown and dying.

Description

Brown rot is caused by multiple species of *Phytophthora* when conditions are cool and wet. Brown rot develops mainly on fruit growing near the ground when *Phytophthora* spores from the soil are splashed onto the tree skirts during rain. Infections develop under continued wet conditions. Fruit in the early stage of the disease may go unnoticed at harvest and infect other fruit during storage.

Management

Brown rot management relies on prevention. Pruning tree skirts to 50 cm above the ground can significantly reduce brown rot.

Fungicide applications should commence on navels and grapefruit varieties from the commencement of colour change. This can be as early as the middle of March on early navel selections. One spray of copper fungicide between October and December before or just after the first rain may provide protection throughout the wet season. When rainfall is excessive, you may have to repeat the spray in January or February.

Spray options are either copper or mancozeb as protectant sprays or phosphorous acid formulations (Supa Perk, Phosguard) as a systemic option. Limit the use of phosphorous acid sprays to a maximum of 3 during the growing season. **Mancozeb (Dithane) must not be applied to fruit that is likely to be exported to the USA.**

Guidelines for Effective Fungicide Control

- Protectant fungicides such as copper, mancozeb (dithane) and phaltan need to cover all parts of the fruit to provide a barrier for any fruit infections. If you are unable to achieve this with your sprayer due to crop loading or tree density consider changing to phosphorous acid sprays.
- Copper sprays do not require the addition of spreader/stickers and slow drying of this chemical on fruit surfaces can lead to skin marking resulting in down grading of fruit. Half rates of copper are sufficient providing coverage is optimum.
- Mancozeb (Dithane) has a local market withholding period of **14 days** on citrus. Do not exceed more than 3 applications. This chemical **should not** be applied to blocks that are likely to supply fruit to the US market.
- Phaltan is another protectant fungicide that can be applied to all citrus to protect against rot development. It has a **3 day** withholding period for fruit supplied solely to the domestic market. This chemical **should not** be applied to blocks that are likely to supply fruit to the US market.

- Phosphorous acid sprays provide protectant and curative action for the development of brown rot, and may provide limited protection against other fungal diseases. Several formulations of phos acid are now on the market. The rates may vary depending on the active rates of the product so read the label carefully or check with your merchant. Last season one client applied five applications over an 11 week period last season on his navel block. This is excessive and expensive. 2-3 applications are sufficient, especially if protectants have been used as well.
- It is recommended that there is an interval of at least 3 weeks between an application of a full strength copper spray and a phos acid spray. The reason for this is we have seen cases in past seasons where skin damage has occurred when these 2 products were applied close together.

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