



Pickled & Pressed Summer 2009

Hi Association Members

It's hot!! Hopefully that will mean the black scale will get fried and that will make a whole lot of members happier as it seems to be a popular theme in this edition.

We welcome Oliver Smith and congratulate Gerard and Toni Smith on producing a potential new member – I love the name.

Please spend the time to respond to Rob Mitchell's questionnaire so that we can put together a programme of seminars and other events.

Ceilidh Meo has given us an up-date on the AOA extra virgin brand launch and Code of Practice.

It's time for me to move on from producing P&P. Is there anyone out there interested in taking it over? I'd hold your hand for a while. It's not an arduous task as members are really good at sending in their stories and sharing their passion for olives and all that they entail. Would be great to hear from you.

Thank you again to those who have contributed to this edition – much appreciated.

Irene Laing

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President's Report

Dear Members,

This is written in the heat of the last week in January – which at least has the virtue of making sure there is no excuse not to be indoors pounding a hot laptop! I hope your fruit set was good; ours was “just average” with the wind and the rain taking its toll in December; but we had some good rain as a kind of recompense.

There are a number of interesting things going on in and around GSOGA – as well as the fun of hearing that Gerard and Toni have christened their new son Oliver. It must be the right name for an olive grower – the “bearer of the olive branch”

As well as the black scale – which is now being fried in the heat – we have suffered quite a lot from olive lace bug; and unfortunately any branches damaged by the lace bug are then very susceptible to hot weather. In chasing the insect problems we are consistently astounded by how the insects focus on the weak trees; we have two areas of our grove where we have not yet got the nutrition right, and the trees suffer from the lace bug. A few metres away there are beefy Frantoio shrugging off every attack. And spot spraying the trees to control the insects has been made much easier now we are using an electric pump and a really effective hand-held gun. For people using organic-acceptable products Natrasoap and Eco Oil is now available in bulk at reasonable prices from the Olive Centre in Queensland

You will see further down in the newsletter a report by Ceilidh Meo on what you need to do to comply with the AOA Code of Practice and qualify yourselves to use the Australian Extra Virgin branding. It would be great to see some small groves moving to use this branding; it represents a powerful way of distinguishing ourselves from the “bulk” products on the supermarket shelves.

As a mild “chivvy”, you will have seen the “short, sharp” questionnaire which Rob Mitchell has sent round to members; please make sure you respond; it literally only takes five minutes and it tells the GSOGA Committee a lot about what we can do which is useful to you as members.

And – as a “taster” for the future – not in this edition, but being planned for the future is an email discussion forum which Deborah Whithear is working on. This is a way of setting up a discussion forum without your email address being bounced round the world for spammers to put on their lists.

Have a happy summer; maybe we will have a cool February

Best wishes

Andrew



Catriona King – disappointing fruit set

My snippet is that our crop looks disappointingly low for no obvious reason, except perhaps the alternate bearing issue as we had a very large crop the year before. Les Ridd has seen the same in his own grove and several others. Would be interested to know how other growers are faring

Our newest and youngest member Olly Smith – aah!



We had a lovely baby boy on the 9th December. 8 1/2 pounds....and he goes by the name of Oliver James!

We have had a few people ask us did we call him Oliver because of our "thing for olives"... but no, we just liked the name. I do hope he'll grow up to love picking them though! I'm sure I'm deluded with that thought...

Toni and Olly are doing fantastically well.

Please let others know of our special harvest.

Gerard and Toni....and Olly

Peter and Kerry Tull's learning curve

Peter and Kerry Tull are new GSOGA members.

We are located in Yea and have 1500 trees, consisting of Frantoio, Leccino and Savallano. We planted in 2002 Dec. It has been hard work as everyone knows, we have been on a steep learning curve with pests, spraying, fertilising, water system breakdowns and now we are coming into pruning which will be an interesting task.

We also run a beef cattle stud, and both of us work elsewhere, Kerry in local government and Peter does farm management in the area.

2008 was the first year that we had a large crop. We sent our oil to Cobram Estate for crushing, and were pleased to receive 700 litres of oil. We went on the great adventure of marketing. Getting a bottle, label, design and many other things that come with getting a bottle of oil on the shelf.

It was a huge year and we are extremely pleased with what developed and the look, feel and taste of the product we know have.

We entered our oil in the Hunter Valley olive show and were thrilled to win a Bronze medal for the frantoio. Unfortunately a misshap with the leccino, but next year we will get both oils in.

I have taken to selling at a few local markets and they are going well.

We are now awaiting this year's crop although it doesn't look as though it will be as big as last but i understand that is the way and as we learn more, get our fertiliser program happening we will produce more. I hope!!

We are looking forward to meeting other members in the near future and look forward to reading the newsletter to hear what others are doing.

Thaks for giving us the oppportunity to work with a group of like minded people, good luck with all your crops in 09.



Gang Gang Grove, Mansfield – Anthony Brown

After 125mm rain November and the 75 mm in December, our trees have responded well with quite prolific new growth and good fruit set. The dam is still quite full and was actually overflowing early December.

We now have 40% of our organic grove affected to a greater or lesser extent with black scale. I recently heard that a lime /sulphur mix into a paste then applied to the tree trunks is a very effective way to control this problem. Any feedback on this would be appreciated. Please email me anthony.brown@aridzone.com.au if you have any views or experience with this solution.

It was great to begin the summer with green grass and damp soil but the inevitable dry is now upon us. The grove is currently being irrigated at the rate of 35 litres per tree twice a week.

Last year's oil has nearly sold with just a few bottles left.



Australian Extra Virgin – Brand Launch and Code of Practice Update

Background:

Ceildh Meo has been GSOGA's representative on the VOC Code of Practice working group. This subcommittee has set out to help small growers in the current situation where:

1. The AOA has launched the "Australian Extra Virgin" Brand and labelling scheme – which provides a powerful identity for high quality oil.

2. But growers must be members of the AOA and subscribe to the AOA Code of Practice as a condition of using the labelling scheme
3. And the Code of Practice is a new and unfamiliar document – which may deter some small growers from using the Australian Extra Virgin Brand.

Ceilidh takes up the story:

Recently, the Victorian Olive Council put together a subcommittee to create a check list for small growers looking to join the Code of Practice signatories, but unsure where to go from here. In my opinion, the document that was created (which is available to download from the member's area of the AOA website) is more of a checklist for good farm management practices rather than for how to comply with the Code. However, I should point out two things:

1. I'm not a member of the AOA, so I haven't seen the finished document that is on the website
2. And that having created a good farm management practices guide is not, in itself, a bad thing for small growers.

And, as examples of good practice:

We all know that safety in the work environment is an important aspect of how our groves are run, but when you sit down to think about it, I'll bet you could come up with a lot of potential risks and issues that, until that moment, you *hadn't* thought about. Do your contractors know how to get in touch with you if there is a problem? If you're not available, who do they contact? Do you observe “no-go zones” after you've sprayed or had someone spray your grove? Where and how do you keep your chemicals on the farm? Do you supply workers with Material Safety Data Sheets for these chemicals and make sure that they know how to use them properly? Do you require basic hygiene after chemical use (eg hand washing etc)? Do you provide facilities for this basic hygiene? Do you have a dress code for workers to ensure basic safety is maintained? Are they required to wear steel cap boots? Do *you* wear steel cap boots to work in your grove or do you run around in gumboots? These are some basic, yet important, questions that the checklists will help you to answer on your own grove.

Keeping Records:

Within the working document that the subcommittee came up with, there are also suggestions of ways to keep and manage records on your farm, such as who sprayed what, when etc. Again, while these may seem like basic suggestions, they are all suggestions which will help you with your compliance program in order to meet the Code of Practice checklist which is available from the downloads page of the AOA website. I have attempted to provide a few online resources that may interest you for further reading and/or planning your own grove procedures.

Laws and Regulations:

Your compliance program needs to document and cover all the relevant food safety, food handling, food labelling, fair trading and health and safety laws. These are available for your perusal from the Victorian Government website: <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/>. They do make for heavy bedtime reading, and are pretty much guaranteed to put you to sleep, but do you know which parts of the Food Safety Act apply to primary producers and which don't? A pdf of Australian Standard AS3806-2006 is available from me via email, my details are at the end of this article. Alternatively, the GSOGA committee has a hard copy available for loan. <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/>

Your food handling procedures should also reflect the HACCP principles. A clear and succinct outline of these principles, as well as suggestions of possible risks relating to your procedures is available online from Hong Kong Government's Centre for Food Safety website:

http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_haccp/programme_haccp_7requirement.html

Complaints Handling and Traceability:

A complaints handling process is also a basic practice of good business. It doesn't matter what your business may be. Australian Standard AS1002-2006 is also available from me as a pdf or in hard copy from the committee and offers great examples of forms that you might like to use as part of your own complaints handling procedures

Being able to trace your product from tree to table is also a very handy way to be able to deal with any complaints that may arise from consumers. If you can pin point where something went wrong with a bottle or a batch, then it's much easier to deal with the issue than if you just know that the product "isn't quite right". The AOA has put together an Annex within the Code itself which outlines the importance of and how to implement product traceability procedures within your business. This document is also available to download from the AOA website.

A Sense of Proportion:

It is not necessary to adopt everything within these standards and the HACCP principles or the guidelines provided on the AOA website into your grove's processes and procedures, but you should base your compliance, complaints handling and food handling procedures on these industry guidelines so that, as a small grower, consumers can be confident that your product carries the same quality assurances that the larger corporate brands do. In this way you'll have to trouble joining the signatories of the AOA's Code of Practice and being able to provide documentation to the AOA if required.

Testing Oil:

In addition to these record keeping issues for small growers, in order to meet the requirements of the Code, you must also have your olive oil tested each year. You need to undertake various tests on the chemical composition of the oil(s) as well as a taste test and "Rance-O-Mat" test to check your oil's use-by date. There are two labs in Australia which are currently accredited by the AOA to undertake this testing, one is Modern Olives at Lara and the other is the Department of Primary Industries lab at Wagga Wagga in NSW. The required testing will cost around \$340 at Modern Olives (http://www.modernolives.com.au/docs/Price_list_2009.pdf) and around \$300 at Wagga (<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/services/das/olive-oil>). This does not include postage of your samples to the relevant laboratory. You will need to get each batch tested, each year, in order to comply with the Code of Practice requirements. ***[See also extract below from recent AOA letter which comments on options to keep the cost of testing down]***

Conclusions:

I hope that the information in this article gives you a jumping off point as to where you may need to do a little more work in order to meet the requirements of accreditation to use the EVOO label. It may seem like a lot of work to get accredited, but your records don't need to be hugely in depth, they just need to be based on the above principles and standards. *[Editor's note: there is good alignment between the record-keeping requirements of the Code of Practice and other requirements which groves may be required to meet – such as those for organic certification]*

If you have any questions, or would like a pdf copy of the standards, please don't hesitate to contact me at apulia.grove@gmail.com.

Ceilidh Meo

Oil Testing – Extract from Recent AOA Letter

1. The cost of testing EVOO to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Code:

Producers may ask the approved laboratory to use the cheaper near infrared technology or the wet chemistry tests. The former gives less precise results, but should be satisfactory if the results are:

- 0.4% or less for free fatty acids
- peroxide value less than 12, and
- 0.004 or less for the UV test.

Based on experience to date the majority of Australian EVOO will therefore not need the more expensive tests.

Under the existing requirements producers may make their own arrangements for organoleptic testing providing the testers meet the requirements. Arrangements are underway in States to identify those willing to assist with this. There is no requirement to use a formal 'panel'.

Black Olive Scale – Russell Kitt

Black Olive Scale is driving us mad. I have been very slack over the last few years and only half heartedly sprayed with Summer Oil. I am now paying the price with around 2000 trees now scale infested to various degrees and some almost totally black.

This year I monitored the crawlers and first noted them in late November. We then sprayed the first weekend in December and then 2 weekends later. I should have sprayed again 2 weekends after that as there were still unhatched eggs under the scale, but just did not have the time.

We sprayed 3000 trees by hand. I have a boom sprayer but it was just 2 windy for that to be effective. The hand sprayers were very good and were powered by the same PTO pump that connects to the boom. It took us less than 1 minute to spray each tree and I am confident that we had 100% coverage. We also walked around 30 km with this project so it additionally keeps us fit.

We sprayed with a 1% solution of Summer Oil which apparently will suffocate the crawlers if you can get to them within 2 weeks of their hatching, and additionally a 0.1% solution of OCP Azamax which is an Insect Growth Regulator. Both were mixed together and sprayed at the same time. Both of these chemicals are recognised by the BFA as being approved for Organic use.

Not all trees in the grove of 6000 trees were effected but at least 50% were. We additionally marked each effected and sprayed tree so we can monitor the results of the spraying.

Russell Kitt
Olivia Estate Olives

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Rosie Garner – Ripped off flowers, rabbits and things going crisp

"Pissed off with the ridiculously cyclonic winds which ripped off most of the flowers which were in abundance at that stage" So since then the ones that survived have morphed into nice looking olives but only half as much as we had last year! They are dry but not stressed and we have hit the scale once again with white oil but they are immune I'm sure so they are marching on. Has anyone got a better solution to scale? Detergent and garlic doesn't work either. Rabbits are the next bane of the rural lifestyle. They are multiplying like only rabbits can and although we spot light often they just seem to keep their numbers up. Anyone know of a good ferreter in the district and are willing to share him??

The good news is our oil is beautiful and although our volume was down on previous years (even though our crop was 3 times bigger!!!!) it is very popular.

After that wonderful rain in Nov/Dec we had "green" everywhere and you could actually see water in the dam from the house instead of clay banks. That has all changed and since the heat wave last week things are really getting crisp. We arrived back from Melb on Wed last week and the temp had dropped in Melb from 39' at 8pm on the Tues night to 25' and so we thought Longwood would be cooler too! But it was 45' according to the car gauge but when I took the barometer outside the kitchen door (not even in the sun) it shot up to 50' so I rushed it back inside in case it exploded!

Apulia Grove Summer Summary 2009 – Charles & Ceilidh Meo

Greetings Pickled and Pressed readers and olive growers of all shapes and sizes!

We just thought we'd provide a quick note about our fruit set, and growing conditions around Heathcote (we're actually closer to Toolleen, if you can find it).

We've inspected our fruit set by the traditional 'eyeball' methodology, in conjunction with large amounts of tramping the grove in more or less searing heat. A bit of background--Apulia Grove is 80 acres, 32 under olives, and we have about 2200 trees--or possibly less, see below. They're organised into four panels: panels 4 and 3 are around 700 trees each, panels 2 and 1 are 842 trees combined.

So, the fruit set: Panel 3 has 221 trees bearing out of 665, or almost exactly 33%. I estimate around 2 kg per tree. Part of the exercise is to test our estimate quality come harvest time as well.

Panel 2 is a wipeout: precisely 3 trees bearing out of 489. Now, we have had a massive black scale problem in this panel, and it's possible that between the scale, and the white oil spraying to get rid of the scale, the fruit set got disrupted and didn't happen. I sprayed panel 2 in mid-November which I now suspect was precisely the wrong time. It also looks like I've 'cooked' about a dozen trees: they've gone totally black (they look burnt) and the leaves fell off. Luckily they all seem to be re-sprouting from the base, so in a few years they might be OK again.

Panel 1 has 84 trees bearing out of 353, which is around 23%, not great but it'll do.

Panel 4 trees have not reached bearing age yet.

Overall, there are 308 trees with serious fruit and we should get about 600 kg.. Based on last year's yield, this should be around 130 litres of oil. We're not going to get rich this way, but it's a start. We are seeing a mixed bag with respect to the 'alternate bearing' that some people report--quite a few of our best trees this year, also had fruit last year (we tag them).

At the moment the bore is fine but the irrigation system is out of action, due to disuse when we bought the property last Easter. There are many blockages and we're having trouble finding a single segment that's working. Priority one for this year is to either fix it or replace it. However, it shows what olive trees can achieve when growing basically 'feral', so this is one tough plant species!

There has been no rainfall in our region since November.

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