



Pickled & Pressed Winter 2007

The time for harvest and been and gone – a good crop for some but others have not been so lucky. Let's move on, the dams are filling, La Nina is being talked about so time to get working on getting things right for a bumper crop next year.

In this issue you can read about our Seminar on 21st April, a brief update from Rosie Gardner about her frustrations with trying to deter the birds. Anthony Brown, Susie Moscovitch, Catriona King and David Carmichael have also written articles about what's been going on in their groves.

Hope to see you all on Sunday 15th July – to hear about Quality Assurance, and the changes to The AOA and the VOC which will impact on us all. We hope it will provide a good opportunity for members to hear Paul Miller, AOA President and Gwynedd Hunter-Payne and also to spend some time meeting and talking with each other and The Committee. A reverse cycle air conditioner has been installed at Gooram so it's warm and cosy. Please let Kaye know asap if you are coming so we can organise the catering. sweetlan@mcmmedia.com.au

Next date for your diary **11th August – Post Harvest dinner.**

At our Seminar on 21st April we heard from Jos Weemaes of Gooramadda Olives that he has been getting up to \$100 per litre for his award winning oils. Why not have a try yourselves and enter some of your oil for assessment. As Nike School of Management says - Go for it!!

8th Australian Golden Olive Awards www.vicolives.com

NSW Northern Olive Oil Show 2007 contact: belwoodgrove724@bigpond.com

Australian National Table Olive Competition ginorusso@olivecare.com.au

2007 Perth Royal Show EVOO Competition entries@raswa.org.au

Olives South Australia 11th Annual EVOO & table olives show longridge@1m.net.au

Irene Laing

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Items and feedback on Pickled & Pressed: Irene Laing

Link to our website: <http://www.goulburnstrathbogieolives.com.au>

President's Report

Dear Members,

The picture below is of your president helping to unload 6 tonnes of chook manure at the beginning of June. Then it was off to Wangaratta and Hybrid Ag to get 700 kg of "special blend" to cure – we hope – our phosphorus deficiency. After that our Manzanillo trees are going to grow like rockets! Either that, or they go for firewood.

Apart from pleading with our trees, **my special appeal this month is for members to come to the seminar on the 15th July.**

1. To hear about the Restructuring of the AOA – and what it means for us
2. To share experience on Quality Assurance and this year's harvest
3. To have a glass of beer or wine (or orange juice) with the Committee

These are all good reasons for coming – but I would like to focus on the AOA. We have had a number of previous opportunities to hear about the AOA and the reception has understandably been mixed; there has been a sense that the AOA has sometimes been remote and not very relevant.

What has changed? Firstly, the AOA has gone through a root-and-branch restructuring to make it representative and to get real support from the federal government.



Secondly, the success of the AOA depends on its ability to show the government that the bulk of ordinary growers – you and me – are on the AOA membership roll. So it is offering basic membership for no additional fee above your existing GSOGA subscription.

Most important, Paul Miller – the President of the AOA & Gwynedd Hunter-Payne – will be speaking at the seminar.

This is your opportunity to hear "from the horse's mouth" how they aim to make the AOA different, relevant and representative in the future – and what that means for you and me.

So, please come – whatever you think of the AOA at present – and give them a clear opportunity to convince you that the AOA is worth supporting.

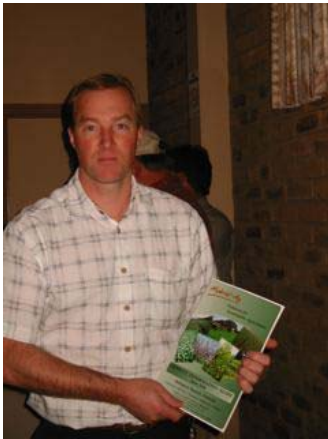
Andrew Laing



GSOGA Seminar – Fertility, Pests & Pickling - Saturday 21st April



About 40 members turned up for this day. The speakers came well prepared, they gave excellent presentations and they answered all the questions we had time for. We came away with lots of useful tips on how to spot and deal with problems, how to do things better and how to succeed.



Tom Rowe – took the first session and talked to us about how we can combine chemistry, physics and biological inputs (inputs which nurture microbe activity), with sustainable farm management practices to produce nutritious and safe food. Trees that are being attacked by pests and diseases are not healthy - beautiful bugs only eat sick plants, they never become confused and eat healthy ones. He emphasized that pH is not an indication of soil nutrition, that we should get our soil tested and address deficiencies with the right mix of minerals, microbes, humus, oxygen and water. For further information contact Tom at Hybrid Ag, 5722-7555 hytech_ag@yahoo.com.au



Peter Spurgin – Pesticide Officer APLC talked to us about Australian plague locusts and wingless grasshoppers and his role in trying to reduce the threat to agricultural production by surveillance of locust habitat areas. The APLC used survey and rainfall data to forecast the nymph stages and then work out an early intervention programme. He showed us some amazing aerial photographs of swarms of locusts as they marched across the land and the devastating effect they have on crops and anything green in their path. He described how difficult it was to keep track of them as they can

travel up to 500 kms per night. Since 1995 Green Guard has been used to control them. Peter's advice was to plant tall grass barriers – such as phalaris and also to monitor hopper numbers. Wait until the numbers were increasing and then apply the Green Guard.



Jos Weemaes of Gooramadda Olives – talked to us about how he produces his AOA prize-winning oils and table olives and how to set up and run a successful olive business. We learnt about how and when Jos picks and then processes his olives. He talked us through the debittering, fermentation and pasteurisation stages for table olives and the food safety risks. He talked about the economics of managing a grove of 1000 trees, about how valuable it was to win a few awards e.g. his AOA prize winning oil earns him \$100 per litre at his cellar door and how important it is to know one's target customer when they come to the cellar door. Typically his cellar door customers are well traveled, have money, friends, interested in food, wine, new experiences, new

foods and wants to talk and learn about his products. Have a look at his site.

<http://www.olivesandoil.info>

Below is an extract of the article written by Rob Mitchell in January this year:

'Essentially the product, "**Green Guard®**", is part of CSIRO's Biocontrol program and is based on the naturally occurring fungus *Metarhizium*. It is a biological pesticide which is primarily effective against locust and grasshopper. Spores of the fungus are suspended in oil, then after being mixed with several hundred litres of water, the suspension is applied as an aerial spray to locust bands and swarms.

The biggest bonus for us was the absence of environmental effects especially on aquatic organisms and birds. It leaves no residues in meat or crops and it can be used in organic stock and horticultural areas where the use of chemical pesticides is undesirable.

Once applied the fungus takes 10-14 days to kill a locust and thus is used more for preventative control on organic properties and in environmentally sensitive areas rather than for prevention of crop damage. Its cost is comparable with that of chemical insecticides.

"**Green Guard®**" is available from [E.E. Muir & Sons Pty Ltd](http://www.eem.com.au) agricultural suppliers (web address - <http://www.eem.com.au> and Landmark).

One for the Birds – a postscript – Rosie Gardner

Thought you'd be interested in knowing how Rosie got on after her trials and tribulations with the birds. She reports:

We harvested on the 23 May and because of the nets over about 20 trees we ended up with 270kgs which made 40 litres!! Better than last year and the year before.

Organic corner – Green Lacewings for olive lace bugs – mmmm??

The green lacewings didn't seem to like our olive lace bugs so back to the drawing board. We sprayed the affected trees with Natrasoap and white oil. The lace bugs seem to have died but the black scale lives on. A recent soil test showed a deficiency in Phosphorous which will stunt growth and reduce resistance to attack by pests so we are now hoping that a combination of the recent frosts and rain plus regular applications of Rooster Booster from Bunnings and Bounce Back from Neutrog plus some prescription blend recommended by Tom Rowe at Hybrid Ag will improve the health of the trees so they become more vigorous and resistant to attack by pests and diseases – and hopefully the feral pigs have also been dealt with!!

Last year we put 5 tonnes of Rooster Booster from Bunnings (composted chicken manure) around our 1000 trees over a year. This year when we went to order Rooster the price had jumped from \$453 to £534 per tonne – ouch! So I contacted Neutrog about Bounce Back (same formula as Rooster Booster, same manufacturer). We ordered via Landmark at Euroa, 6 tonnes for the pasture as well as the trees for \$472 per tonne delivered in 20 kg bags. Bounce Back normally comes in 40 kgs bags but we are not willing to lift more than 20 kgs so we had to ask Neutrog to get them to bag it specially for us – not a problem, they were very willing to help. We also got Hybrid Ag to make up a prescription blend, again in 20 kgs bags.

Take note - we still have living and breeding scale on our trees despite quite a few nights where the temperature has fallen to -5C and having sprayed the trees with white oil and Burgundy mixture. Iain Towers also reported noticing scale when he was pruning his trees last week. Be warned and go out and have a look.

Irene Laing

Grove Invasion - David and Marion Carmichael Thornton

Well we endured the frosts, we endured the hail, we endured the drought and now the rains had come and it was just starting to green up and about half our trees still had olives. We were starting to think about our drought recovery strategy when along came the deer. All the younger trees have been reduced by as much as 90% of their foliage and branches. The larger trees have had all the lower foliage removed and branches that the deer could reach they have broken off destroying the shape of the tree.

Well there just has to be a bright side to all this! We didn't have to pick fruit this year and we will not be not be picking any next year. And then there's the black scale, all gone and the lace bug, all gone too! The deer weren't choosy.



Don't give up your day job –

Les Ridd

Whilst walking through the Vroland's, Gundawarra Rural Grove with Marg, the Vroland's and the Laing's I made a casual comment, after seeing the devastation caused by grasshoppers, the poor yield caused by late frosts and evidence of Black Scale, that we as Olive growers should not give up on our day jobs.

A large percentage of GSOGA growers are either retirees on lifestyle properties or those who are still working and are having a dip into country lifestyle by having an olive grove. A year as we have just experienced, is enough to dampen anyone's enthusiasm, and those dependent upon olive production for an income are worse off.

There is a difference though between the normal run of the mill farm industries and the horticultural industry however. You may not make any money, but the trees do not die in a drought, and there is no cost to keep them alive, whereas with livestock, breeding stock numbers are sacrificed at depressed sale prices with the remainder being fed expensive feed supplements just to keep them alive and healthy. Breeders then have to be purchased after the drought at high prices, driven by increased demand, just to get back to a viable farm operation. Do we ever catch up?

Harvesting yields this year were varied with some groves better than expected and others disappointing and most not harvested at all. We harvested over 5000 trees at one grove that averaged 7.5 kg per tree. This would at least pay the cost of harvest at approximately a dollar per litre and the same cost for processing, but to maintain tree health and future production the olives had to be removed. In another area we harvested trees that averaged 30 kg plus making that grove a viable proposition.

We can all look forward to a better future now that most of our members trees are 7 + years old and if well fertilised, watered and managed, should be yielding more than 25 kg per tree. But do not forget that this is farming and subject to many variables.

Drought impact on our 2007 harvest – Catriona King

We have 2 small groves, totalling 500 trees, 8 and 9 years old on the western side of the Strathbogies. Approximately 125 of the 9-year-old trees are Manzanillos and the rest Frantoio/Corregiola (sold as different trees but we reckon they are the same or so similar you can't tell the difference). We harvested our biggest crop to date of about 3.3 tonnes in 2006, resulting in about 600 litres oil (20% yield).

It was pretty clear from mid/late winter 2006 that this year was going to be very different. We have a 3 Meg dam for irrigating and we can also pump out of another 1 Meg house dam (this really isn't enough for full irrigation of 500 trees but it's what we'll make do with). By the end of winter there had been very little run off and the dams were about 1/4 full (if that). We contemplated giving the trees their winter "big drink" to aid flower set but didn't do so. We had never done this before as there is usually plenty of winter rain. As the Spring progressed, the dam levels started to go the wrong way and we sold 80% of our cattle in early October as things looked pretty grim (the cattle de-stocking proved to be a good decision as we saved ourselves much money and heartache trying to feed them through summer and we have now bought back in at a good price).

Back to olives... by early October it was clear that the little water in the dams was all we were going to have for the season and evaporation was going to account for all of it if we tried to save it. So, we irrigated once per week for four weeks through October (at about 150 litres per tree per irrigation event). That was it for the trees - the 3 Meg dam was then dry at the end of October and we saved a small amount of water in the house dam for fire fighting (gave up on the garden watering). We were luckier than many in that we didn't get the frosts at our 500m elevation (or at least not as many and not as severe as others experienced). There were several

mornings when I would drive down the hill to work at Seymour and enter a "white winter wonderland" when I hit Avenel, some 4-6 degrees colder than home.

We were resigned to not having a crop this year and were just hoping that the trees would survive with absolutely no water through the whole of summer (and last 2 months of spring) - which they did admirably, no losses at all. A quick look at the trees in March showed a very few small, dry looking fruit which then seemed to pump up with water after a bit of rain late March. With more rain in April, I assumed that the few olives on the trees would be full of water at the expense of oil, and indeed they did feel "squishy" to touch. We then faced the dilemma of what to do with the few olives on the trees, as we couldn't just leave them. Not only would that interfere with fruiting next year, it would also create a weed spread risk as the Currawongs, Choughs and Rosellas have taken a liking to olives and there is the potential of seedlings being spread by them. In the Adelaide hills there is a major problem with feral olives which have completely replaced the native vegetation in large areas - anyway maybe a topic for another article (I work for DPI on social research in weed management so am a bit sensitive about being a primary producer of "weeds"). We had assiduously pruned the trees hard last winter for mechanical harvesting so what little fruit there was, was all up very high which would have meant getting up a ladder for every tree if we were to hand harvest or even just strip the fruit and let it drop.

We decided to have the fruit tested for oil content to help us with the decision about whether to harvest at all (which for us – as we're lazy, means mechanical harvesting so we had to weigh up the cost/benefit). To our surprise the test showed a 19% oil content at the end of April, so we decided to go ahead and ask Les to mechanically harvest – he has done this for us for the last 3 years and the removal efficiency has increased each year in line with the increase in the tree diameter. At the end of May, we harvested the huge amount of 550kgs - about 16% of the size of last year's crop. Interestingly, none of the Manzanillo's had any fruit worth harvesting; we only harvested the Frantoio/ Corregiolas. Eberhard, from EV olives at Markwood processed the fruit for us and we got a 22% yield of oil with a very intense, peppery flavour, so we're pretty happy with it. We certainly won't break even but at least the fruit is off the trees and we have a little oil to share with family and friends. The other upside is that we saved on herbicide and fuel costs as there was nothing to spray/slash and we won't have to prune much at all this winter, which we now find is the biggest and most onerous task of our grove management

So, I think the take home message for us is how tough these trees are and never give up on the possibility of at least some sort of crop.

I hope other growers have also come out of the drought with trees now flourishing.

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Gang Gang Grove, Burnt Creek Mansfield – Anthony Brown

Like most groves in Victoria the flower set from our 10 year old (420) Manzanilla and Sevillano trees was all but wiped out with the severe frosts of November 2006.



We did however end up with some fruit – a meager 70 kilos. The olives were firm, plump and excellent quality. Ideally they should have been pickled but we couldn't find anyone in the North East who could pickle them. Hopefully this situation will change in the near future. So we decided to press them with Craig McCauley coming to the rescue using his new Molesworth pressing equipment. The result was around 10 litres of quality oil and a yield of

around 11%. We'll bottle it under our Gang Gang label and it will be available at the Regional Produce Store in Mansfield as well as Gary Crowe's organic business where it sells well. Our trees are irrigated and the system was on right through last winter, spring and summer so they are looking really healthy. The only hindrance is black scale which is affecting about a third. Rainfall in May was 120mm with 22mm falling in June to date. We welcome other growers so feel free to contact me if you're in the Mansfield area 0417 882223.



Goulburn River & Ranges story on 2007 olive season – Susie Moscovitch

Well we finally harvested 30 days or 4 weeks and 4 attempts after our initial start. We arranged to start on Saturday 28th April but had to cancel due to 12ml rain overnight on the Friday. We started again the following Friday 4th May, but due to the rain the mechanical shaker was ring-barking the trees and had to stop. With the help of friends six of us hand picked for the rest of the day and the next morning until we had 380 kilos of olives. We delivered these to Kyneton Olives and they produced 100 litres of excellent oil.

Friday 18th May was the next date set aside for harvesting but due to more rain this was cancelled. Finally I arranged for a team of grape pickers from Seymour, three very kind friends and the contract mechanical shaker to try again. The pickers arrived and started at 7:30 am on Sunday 27th May and the harvester arrived and started at 10am. Everyone worked hard until 4pm and the olives were picked up and delivered to Kyneton Olives at 6pm. The next day we started again, then at 10am with only 100 trees left to harvest of the 1200, the harvester broke down and had to stop! This meant that instead of just collecting olives left on the trees after they had been shaken, the pickers now had 100 trees to hand pick. By 4pm they had finished the 100 trees and gone back and cleared the other trees of all the olives! They were great. These olives were picked up by F.W.Parris & Sons and taken to Kyneton Olives where they produced more really good quality oil. However the yield is only half of the previous season although I think that the quality is better.

The oil now needs to settle for several weeks in large stainless steel containers before being ready to bottle and distribute. The date for the release is most likely the first week in July but we are releasing some of the oil we harvested first and it will be available at Ruffy General Store and at Nagambie outlets by the end of June.

One hundred people from the local region and Melbourne celebrated the end of harvest at Kyneton Olives over the Queen's birthday. We enjoyed a four-course meal; show casing olive oil and local wines. The dinner as you can see was held in the processing shed with the new processor and newly processed olive oil as a backdrop!

Kyneton Grove Manager Elio, who has been processing our oil for the past three years, his wife and me on the right.

