

## **The Australian Avocado Industry**

**Graham Anderson**

The Australian industry, although still small by world standards, is currently experiencing a massive increase in plantings. This is occurring in most production areas but the major expansion is in southwest Western Australia and central Queensland. Western Australia supplies excellent quality fruit during the Australian summer when prices are high and supplies from other growing areas are scarce. Because of reduced world sugar prices, many cane farms in central Queensland are being sold at relatively low prices for the growing of avocado and macadamia. Central Queensland is a major winter producing area. Queensland is the largest producing State with approximately 68% of national production. Hass remains the most widely grown cultivar with Shephard and Sharwil the next two in importance. Sharwil originated in Australia; Shephard is a Californian variety where it was discarded as being unsuitable because of its sensitivity to low temperatures during flowering.

National production has been rather static for the past three years at some 26,000 tonnes per annum. This is because most growing areas in Australia have been struggling with serious drought. The total number of avocado trees at the end of 2001 - 2002 financial years was 375,000 under six years of age and 572,000 over six years of age.

### **Marketing and Promotion**

The marketing committee of Avocados Australia Limited is doing a commendable job guiding the marketing and promotion programme. They realize that if fruit is kept moving through the marketing chain, fruit quality at retail outlets is high. Television advertising is used to increase sales during critical supply/demand periods. This is augmented throughout the year with press releases, point of sale material, magazine advertising, instore merchandising and recipe leaflets promoting the range of uses for avocado. Promotion is funded by a 25 cents levy per carton, which is matched by government.

There has been a large improvement in fruit quality on the retail shelves in recent years. This is because larger cooperatives are being formed where pack house managers demand high quality fruit. Also, supermarkets are becoming extremely aware of the best production times from the different areas and only purchase fruit from these areas during these periods. In addition, oil extraction companies are paying 70 cents per kg for inferior fruit, fruit which otherwise may find its way onto the fresh fruit market.

## **Research and Development**

The Australian industry is fortunate to have a highly motivated R & D Committee with the knowledge and desire to address research challenges for the future.

Emphasis is being placed on genetic improvement. Rootstocks and scions are being imported from overseas for evaluation. Selections are also being made from local genetic material. The rootstock Velvick, a member of the West Indian race which was selected in Australia by Dr. Tony Whiley, continues to show good Phytophthora root rot tolerance as well as imparting high productivity. It has also been shown to impact in the quality of Hass fruit, particularly postharvest anthracnose development. Dr. Whiley has established rootstock trials in the major growing areas.

The Department of Primary Industries Fruit Pathology team at Indooroopilly is investigating new strategies for the control of avocado fruit diseases and Phytophthora root rot. These include the use of plant activators (e.g. silicon) which influence natural defence compounds in the avocado.

Avocado canopy management is also receiving a lot of attention. There are a number of methods recommended for achieving results. These include the use of mechanically pruned hedgerows, particularly for larger orchards, while smaller growers tend to prefer various systems of limb removal. Another method, which is gaining popularity, is to replace the entire field every 12 to 14 years. This allows the grower to use new genetic material (rootstocks and scions) which has been evaluated and proven for their area.

Other research projects include the development of non-chemical treatments against Queensland fruit fly to allow market access; the control of fruit spotting bug using hotspots for targeted control; optimizing post harvest quality through improved calcium nutrition and improved farm management information by advancing AVOM AN (software for avocado farm management).

These R & D projects are funded through a grower levy of three cents per carton which is again matched by government.

Updates on industry R & D and other industry matters are communicated through the quarterly journal "Talking Avocados". Also, during 2003 Avocados Australia organized a series of R & D Roadshows, where researchers presented the latest information from the R & D programme to growers in each major production region. It is planned to hold these Roadshows every four years.

## **Export**

Avocados Australia Limited has recognized the need to develop new markets. An Export Development Committee has been formed which has been working in a number of areas, including market access, market intelligence and assessment and promotion of Australian avocados internationally.

## **Industry Structure**

Avocado Australia Limited has a grower elected Board which is of vital importance to

the industry.

**The Board of Avocado Australia Ltd.**

---

Rod Dalton	Chairman (Executive Committee)
Henry Kwaezynski	Director and Treasurer (Executive Committee)
Peter Mollenaar	Director (Executive Committee)
Colin Fechner	Director
Chris Nelson	Director
Lachlan Donovan	Director
Wayne Franceschi	Director
Colin Cummings	Director
Antony Allen	CEO (Executive Committee)

**Address:**

Avocado Australia Ltd  
PO Box 663  
STONES CORNER QLD 4120  
**AUSTRALIA**  
Phone: 61 73391 2344  
Fax: 61 3391 2388  
Email: [admin@avocado.org.au](mailto:admin@avocado.org.au)  
Web: [www.avocado.org.au](http://www.avocado.org.au)

Graham Anderson  
Phone: 61 266777229

A website <http://www.avocado.org.au> for the Australian industry was established in 2004. This has increased the ability of growers, researchers, consumers, and media to assess the latest information on the Australian industry.