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News

A Sustainable Australian Avocado Industry - 21/02/2011

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An increase in public awareness and concern for the environment has led to a significant increase in consumer demand for 'safer' food and more environmentally sensitive production methods. Australian avocado growers recognise that to remain competitive they must meet consumer expectations, in addition to increasing demands to optimise fruit yield and quality, reduce chemical use, and develop market opportunities.

Avocados Australia have initiated a project with the objective to identify sustainable orchard management practices used by avocado growers across Australia; conduct trials to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies; and provide recommendations to the wider industry on the most promising practices.

"Through projects such as this, the Australian avocado industry strives to provide customers the 'greenest', most environmentally friendly, Australian avocado possible" commented Mr Antony Allen, CEO of Avocados Australia.

A total of 25 sites have been selected as case studies from the major production areas across Australia (including North, Central and Southern Queensland, Northern and Central New South Wales, the Tri-State and Western Australia).

At these sites a range of orchard management practices and products are being used including: mulching, natural mineral fertilisers, fish and kelp concentrates, composts teas and other brewed microbes, molasses and branch scoring. Growers from each site provide information on the timing and cost of their orchard management operations and the impact of these practices on tree health, fruit quality and yield.

In Central Queensland the effect of mulching on tree growth, yield and fruit quality was investigated during 2009/10. Trees were mulched with filter-press (a sugar industry by-product), cane-tops and avocado woodchip in September 2009. In the first year of the experiment there was no significant effect on shoot growth and yield. However, all mulches tended to improve fruit quality. Mulches were re-applied in September 2010 and the effect on yield and fruit quality will be determined in June 2011.

Trials investigating the effect of a range of soil and foliar treatments also commenced in Central and Southern Queensland in September 2009. Although there was no significant effect on yield, several treatments tended to improve fruit quality. The most promising treatments will be reassessed in the 2010/11 cropping season.

The effect of branch scoring on fruit size and yield was investigated at several sites across Australia. Scoring involves cutting a groove around the branch to sever the phloem using a knife or pruning saw. Branches are scored in the Autumn to reduce vegetative growth and increase flowering the following Spring. Results indicate that branch scoring may provide a non-chemical approach for increasing cropping in vigorous avocado trees, particularly in southern growing regions. Further trials investigating the effect of branch scoring on vigorous regrowth resulting from stumping trees have been established.

"Many Australian avocado growers already implement sustainable environmentally friendly agriculture practice, however we understand that responsible environmental management is only achieved through a process of continual improvement" said Mr Allen.

Evaluation of several orchard management practices is ongoing and further trials have been established in other growing regions in the 2010/11 season.

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Avocados Australia Limited is the Peak Industry Body in Australia for Avocados. We are a "not for profit" membership based organisation. Our members are Avocado growers along with associated businesses and industry people.

Avocados Australia seeks to work with all parts of the chain from production through to the consumer. By working together we seek to continually improve the ability of growers to provide a healthy, profitable and safe product for all consumers. As part of this continual improvement we guide a "research & development" and "marketing and promotion" program for the Australian Avocado industry.

The Australian Avocado industry comprises 1100 growers across the country and produces 49,500 tonnes of Avocados each year worth **\$AUD180 million at farm gate and \$430 million at retail level**. Key growing areas are North, Central and Southeast Queensland, Northern and Central New South Wales, the Sunraysia or Tristate area (South Australia, Victoria and South Western New South Wales) and Western Australia.

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