



Olives WA News – August 2021

I guess many are doing what I am now, watching the rain, again (and happily so), dealing with the administrative stuff and trying to get back into the grove to prune and mulch before fertilising the grove for the spring flower set. Everything seems to have pointed to a big year for olive producers in '21. Pests were minimal but those early summer rain events really set off the fungal issues. Dealing with Anthracnose needs close attention and continued tree management along with efficient soil health and nutrition. Yields were very good and we wait to hear about the qualities after the coming EVOO Competitions. Nominations for the AIOA competition are open now.

WA Olive Awards

The WAOC Board finally got through the COVID 19 net of limitations and had a meeting a few weeks ago. The main topics we focussed on included the upcoming WA Olive Awards. Ellen Slobe, our Chief Steward, has been busily seeking sponsors, (Our Major Sponsor is Nutrien Ag and AOA has taken up a partnership that will sponsor our judges continued training. We also thank Olio Bello, Tarralea and Preston Valley for their continued support), advertising the competition (*Check the Olives WA web page for details with entries opening on 23 August and closing on 9 September 2021 for the judging in October*) and assisting our competition committee in preparing a COVID friendly event for competitors to meet late in October, discuss the industry, receive awards and re-establish networks. I look forward to catching up again. The Board is discussing future opportunities to expand our competition to include other olive products. Let us know your thoughts.

WA Olives Survey

We are developing a survey to go to every olive grower in WA, if we can find them. This survey aims to find the broad extent of the olive industry at its primary end (the growers and processors) as we want to be sure that WAOC actually services the needs of olive growers and businesses. Promoting businesses and identifying the key issues are a primary focus of the Board and we are also keen to develop models for marketing both locally and internationally. As we engage in this research, we would like to hear about the surrounding issues that impact on these, and any other larger issues, so that we can develop strategies and processes that will lessen their impacts on our businesses. Integrating pest and disease management for olives is becoming increasingly important as we hear of diseases in Europe that have resulted in huge losses of old olive groves through *Xylella fastidiosa* while our eastern states colleagues are dealing with Mediterranean fruit fly impacting on fruit.

Product Sharing

Pruning by hand is time costly. Ever tried mechanical pruning? It only does 50% of the job but brings the canopy down to a workable height and a mechanical mulcher or chipper over the top of the prunings provides a useful mulch.

We are all keen to tout the healthful values of olives. A constant challenge is to get fertiliser and soil conditioners as near to organic as possible. There are some organic products and options out there you may want to investigate. Some have been trialled and have shown excellent results.

Seasonal labour – COVID always gets a bit of airtime - several opportunities have been shared and may warrant your thinking for coming work of pruning or harvesting in 2022. One grower engaged a local support group to assist in harvesting. This offered a cash input to the organisation and offered some disadvantaged and socially at-risk people with a chance to rebuild. An extension of this was with a church group engaging in a support role. Another opportunity taken up by a grower was to offer part-time employment to an on-release prisoner from a local Correction Centre. This offered the person a chance to get away from the past influences, earn an income, be provided room and board as part of the package and develop a mentorship that could help in future life in our community.

Marketing

The good season will bring about a lot more good quality EVOO onto our local markets this year. If you have a surplus and wish to sell it. Please let us know and we can then put you in contact with prospective buyers or collaborative growers looking to enhance their sales. We are also getting a lot of interested buyers of groves and those looking to establish new groves with new varieties. If you are in the market for either option, we may be able to help. We aren't brokers, merely a street map for offering directions. You choose the route.

We continue to investigate various models for small to medium sized groves to enter the export market. Although most government agencies see the scale of economy not so profitable, there is an increase in international buyers looking for niche market products. Watch this space.

Research

Last year, a science graduate from Murdoch University started a PhD research project into locality influences on the qualities to be found in olive oil from specific olive varieties across the regions of WA. Although the research is not yet complete, we have been informed that there are definite differences according to soil, climate, and latitudes. We await the final paper and its findings.

If any of these interests you and you wish to discuss them deeper, and you are a member of WAOC, please drop me a line and I will put you in touch with other growers or offer suggestions for contacts for products and markets. There is no fee being taken by me. It is purely a service to members. These are suggestions only and, as with all suggestions, we don't have to accept them or use them. If you have ideas that are worth sharing, please drop me a brief outline and I will share these within the industry for wider discussion.

Steve Milton

President

WA Olive Council

August 2021.