

Dried grapes: ADFA Forum

Peter Jones, ADFA Chairperson, spoke about meetings and discussions ADFA has conducted with political leaders to ensure the water issue remains a high priority in state and federal governments, local councils and grower bodies.

Water is a major issue amongst horticultural industries in the Riverlink region. The Australian Dried Fruit Association (ADFA) has been working with government agencies to conduct water workshops and seminars to provide water strategy advice to growers.

Working with Plant Health Australia (PHA) the ADFA has signed the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD). A biosecurity levy has been set at zero to be enacted if an incursion should occur.

Prices rose slightly during the 2006/07 season, all variety productions were down for the season at approximately 20,000 tonnes. However, imports rose by 2.1% total across all varieties.

ADFA is also working with all horticulture industries to introduce an import levy to fund the development of generic promotions. This issue has been taken to all major political parties prior to the 2007 election.

The ADFA marketing trust has funded projects such as a generic marketing campaign, crown bunch removal, and berry shatter. Export promotions have been conducted through trade fairs.

Total world production of dried grapes for 2006 is approximately 1.1 million tonnes. Dried grape harvest continues via manual labour and the US continues to have labour issues with illegal immigrants their major source. However, signs indicate that there are improvements being implemented on the world marketing scene.

Chris Ellis and Richard Finlay, Sunbeam, outlined the company's main driver to decrease costs and increase productivity/processing. The organisation is focussing on improving processing facilities, in particular efficient storage through investigating possibilities of storage bags, instead of boxes.

Sunbeam has grown sales over 2006, sultanas have been the fastest growing category by more than 6%. "Prices are expected to increase in 2008. However, the market continues to be tough and we

Garth Swinburn, Scholefield Robinson, has been working on an economic sustainability project for the industry to investigate the relationship between property size, its associated management inputs and profitability and return on investment.

"Growers are interested to know whether larger enterprises do in fact have economies of scale if so where are they and how big are the benefits," Mr Swinburn said.

A model has been developed to test levels of profitability for different size enterprises, but will also assist growers to test benchmark scenarios such as returns/ML of water use, hours of labour per hectare, production costs per tonne and rate of return on capital invested in the enterprise.

Along with other horticulture industries in the region, the dried fruit industry has received funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to complete a *Taking Stock and Setting Direction* project.

Wayne Street, DAFF, outlined the project objectives to investigate alternative marketing options, complete market research and development, and strengthen supply chain partnerships.

In particular, DAFF is focussing on developing innovative approaches to markets and establish new partnership initiatives between growers and processors.

"We are evaluating demand driven opportunities," Mr Street said. "Australia has one of the highest levels of dried fruit domestic consumption per capita. We need to focus on future deliveries."

The ADFA also celebrated its 100 year anniversary. The industry is the first to be established in the Sunraysia region and was also one of the first to introduce a levy for research and development.



In celebrating the industry's achievements over the past 100 years, Peter Jones recognised the state and federal government agencies' contributions and research outcomes as being an essential function to advancing the industry.