



Harvest Trail eNews: Winter 2010



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Industry update

Batlow apples

When you go to the supermarket or your local fruit and veg shop you will often find apples with a little sticker that proclaims the delicious product is from Batlow. New South Wales ranks second in apple production in Australia, producing 17% of the national crop, with Batlow being the major growing area along with the district of Orange.

Although the Batlow Fruit Co-op is only one of several sheds in the region that pack apples, their effective marketing has made the town on the south west slopes synonymous with the juicy, crisp fruit.

Even the two large supermarket chains that dominate the Australian retail landscape have had to concede on their demands for no-brand packaging, as the name of the Batlow product has such a strong association with quality, they saw it in their best interests to have the Batlow brand sit beside their own.

Apples have dominated the area surrounding Batlow for decades, but for the last 30 years they have become the crop of choice for most growers. The second half of the twentieth century saw major strides in the ability to keep apples fresh all year round, with cool storage coupled with many new varieties allowing the public to access sweet, crunchy apples whenever they wanted.

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covered fruit trees

More recently the innovation of netting to protect from summer hailstorms that sweep the picturesque mountain region, has meant insurance from the damage inflicted by Mother Nature. Reduced damage from wind and also from birds, particularly cockatoos, has also been a benefit of the protective veils, in the quest to improve not only the yield but also the appearance of the fruit. A significant investment is required for this expensive covering over the trees, but each year sees larger areas under the protection, providing a striking visual contrast between the pristine white netting against the deep green of surrounding trees.

But even netting can't completely protect growers, with the 2010 harvest expected to be well down on last year's bumper crop. Wind and cold weather during flowering discouraged bees from their important task of pollinating the fruit, resulting in a much lower than desirable fruit set. Apparently bees are a little like many humans; below 13 degrees they seek the comfort of their homes and are reluctant to be active.

A day in the life of a working backpacker

Ah yes, a day in the life of a watermelon picker

UK backpacker Tom Knowles, shares his journal as he travels and works throughout Australia.

Wake up 5am. Breakfast is a large strong coffee and cereal, combined with murmured 'good mornings' to fellow workers. You know its going to be a good day. But every joint in your body screams 'NO'.



The quota for the day is 100 tons, and the melons need to be picked, so its back to work all too soon. Its getting hotter by the hour, your water is now hot to the point of warm tea, but you are all in the same boat so complaining will only make things go slower.



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Picking watermelons isn't rocket science. In basic terms you pick the big ones. They should have a dead 'curly' so you know its ripe, and a slight yellow tinge on the skin. Too much yellow and the melon is burnt, too little and it will taste like old, watery cheese.



melons, melons, melons...

A good watermelon is round like a football, but they come in all shapes and sizes. A big melon is an exception to the above rules. 20 kilos or above is just a simple pick and place procedure, no thought, just pick and move forward. Judging these things is easy to a 'trained' eye, but to a 'novice' it might take ten seconds or so to judge if the melon is worth picking. Unfortunately by this time the tractor has probably advanced a good fifteen feet and you might find yourself playing catch up for three or four melons after.



more melons...

If you are on the tractor you don't have to pick, but sort the melons. Not as physical but more of a mental battle. Tapping a melon with an open palm to hear its resonance. If its tight like a drum, it's a good melon and goes in its namesake bin. If it's a deeper hollow sound, it has a hole in the middle, due to several mind numbingly boring reasons, and is a 'second', cheaper melon. You will do little or no walking whilst on the tractor, but eight hours of tapping melons is enough to push even the most grounded individual to the edge of being classed clinical.

There is money in fruit picking, and in Bundaberg it was

high season for melons and pumpkins. I have picked over the last 15 days sweet potatoes, rockmelons, watermelons and two types of pumpkins. All have their quirks, sweet potatoes you get filthy and its fast sweaty work. Pumpkins will leave you scratched to oblivion and are home to the poisonous red back spider, so gloves are a must. Rockmelons are much smaller than their cousins but grow in higher density so the work is same as that of watermelons, only lighter and faster. In two weeks I have earned over 1,000 and have saved over 700. Content in the knowledge that I will likely be an inch shorter by the end of my stay in Bundaberg and well on the way to being built like the proverbial brick, but I will leave with some good memories and some great friends.

To be continued.....

Staff Profile

Terrie Giddings, State Marketing Manager

What led you to this position

After working in the Vocational Educational industry for many years, I was looking for change and jumped at the chance to apply for this position when it became available. I could see the parallels in both roles; both relying heavily on communication.



Also, having been raised in the horticultural oasis that is Sunraysia, I felt I had a solid background in harvest.

How long have you worked here

I have worked for the NH IS for approximately three years now. I commenced as State Manager for NT, SA and Tas, but responding to a need for dedicated marketing presence, I now only manage Tasmania along with the marketing of the service.

Can you tell us about the most unusual request you've received in this job

As State Managers we take every opportunity to visit growers on their home turf. On one such visit to a cherry farm in Tasmania, I accommodated a farmer's busy schedule by agreeing to chat in the truck while he checked the plantings. The previous day's heavy rain took its toll on

the truck when it becoming bogged in the thick mud standing behind the truck pushing, knee high in mud, I began to question my career change.

Are you tempted to take the Harvest rail yourself one day

I would love to travel the country and pick for my own consumption only.

You must know a lot about what is grown throughout Australia are there any crops that are perhaps little known to others

I don't want to sound biased but for a gourmet feast, you have to take a culinary trek through Tasmania. Fresh berries, vegetables, meat and seafood it's all there!

Growers addock

Job requirements shorter people encouraged to apply

There are numerous vineyards scattered around Australia, providing lots of work for grape pickers and pruners. Generally these are pretty good jobs, with a bit of bending involved in picking, with cold and wet weather sometimes a problem during pruning. That's usually the case unless you end up picking or pruning some of the vines at Bannockburn Vineyards in the Moorabool Valley, Victoria.



Bannockburn Vineyards was established by Stuart Hooper in 1974. His vision was to create a vineyard which would produce Australian wine of a quality to emulate the great wines of France, in particular the great Burgundies. Stuart Hooper had a purist, uncompromising approach to quality grape growing and winemaking. He had a strong belief in making wines which genuinely reflect the flavours of the vineyard.



Bannockburn Vineyards is located 25 km north west of Tairāhema along the Midland Highway, just outside the township of Bannockburn. All Bannockburn wines are produced from estate grown fruit off 27 hectares of vines. The vineyard soil profile ranges from black brown volcanic loam to dense clay sitting on a limestone base, and is generally of low fertility. The first vineyard was planted in 1974 with subsequent plantings during the early 1980's, making them among the oldest in the Tairāhema region. Recent plantings include high density blocks of Pinot Noir and Shiraz on a 1m x 1m spacing, that is rows and vines both 1m apart resulting in 10,000 vines per hectare compared with a normal vineyard which usually has about 2000 vines per hectare. The trellis height is only 0.5m compared with 1.1 - 1.4m for most conventional vineyards, which means a lot of bending and kneeling to pick and prune these vines. Vineyard manager Lucas Rigby who is a lanky 1.8m tall says a good back massage is the order of the day after working on these vines.



The average rainfall of 600mm occurs mainly in winter and spring, although with the effect of the ongoing drought, has been considerably lower in recent years. The rainfall is consistently much lower than neighbouring wine growing regions such as the Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula. The maritime influence over the weather ensures mild temperatures and long sunshine hours. It is normal to experience a pattern of stable, dry and low humidity conditions over the grape growing season, from budburst in mid September through to the end of harvest in late April. This allows for a mild, extended ripening period and ideal conditions for producing healthy fruit and gradual flavour development in the grapes.

All the established vineyards are dry grown, this along with poor soil fertility, low rainfall, close plantings and strong prevailing winds make for a tough growing environment that naturally restricts yields. These are the conditions that make up the terroir from which unique wine flavours and wine structure are derived.

Some of the ultra premium single vineyard wines produced from these tough vines include:

- Serr Pinot Noir grown using close planting, low trellising and narrow rows to replicate the tough vineyard conditions of Grand Cru Burgundy, naturally yielding at 500g vine.
- Range the original vineyard site planted in 1974, dry grown vines with natural cropping of 1.0kg vine to produce a powerful expression of cool climate Shiraz.

Thinking of picking or pruning grapes at Bannockburn shorter people are encouraged to apply...

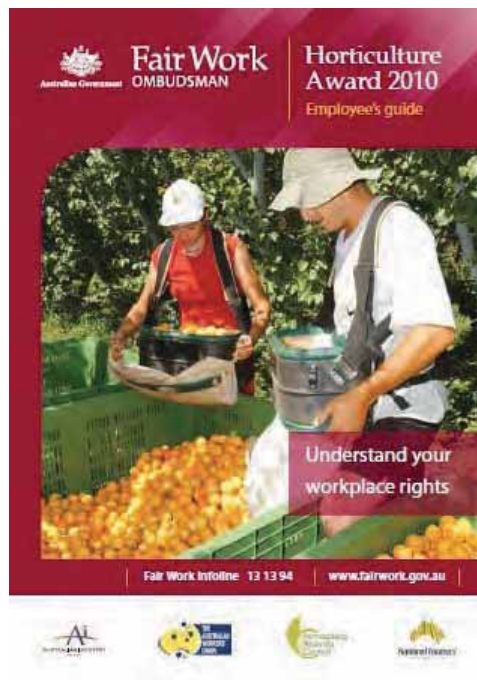
Industry Update

Employee's Guide to the Horticulture Award 2010

The Fair Work Ombudsman in association with the Australian Industry Group, Australian Workers' Union, Horticulture Australia Council and the National Farmers' Federation is running a campaign to educate employers and employees about the Horticulture Award 2010.

Fair Work has produced a guide for [employers](#) also available in print form that Ai Group, HAC and NFF are using to educate horticulture employers.

To compliment this publication, Fair Work have also just released a simple guide for [employees](#) that will be distributed by the AWU and available on the Fair Work [website](#).



ff the eaten rack

he past few months

The NH IS maintains a busy schedule with State Managers visiting industry groups, attending field days, conferences and expos to ensure that our service is recognised Australia wide. Our travel schedule over the past three months has included:



March

1 st March	Citrus Australia Marketing Meeting, Renmark SA
9 th -14 th March	Melbourne Caravan and Camping Supershow
15 th – 18 th March	Visitation, Lismore NSW
19 th March	Centrelink Employment Expo, Lismore NSW

April

13 th -16 th April	Visitation, Bundaberg Qld
27 th – 30 th April	Ballina National Stone fruit Conference, Ballina NSW

May

6 th May	Centrelink Employment Expo, Ballarat Vic
7 th – 9 th May	AGFEST, Launceston Tas
14 th May	Centrelink Employment Expo, Shepparton Vic
19 th May	Centrelink Employment Expo, Bundaberg Qld
19 th – 21 st May	Centrelink Employment Expo, Ipswich Qld
27 th – 30 th May	AUSVEG National Convention, Gold Coast Qld

Upcoming events

Over the next few months

The NH IS team attends many field days, events and conferences throughout the year and there is bound to be one close to you.



Over the next three months we will be attending the following events and we welcome you to visit us to discuss your labour needs:

June

4th June

Centrelink Employment Expo,
Sunshine Coast Qld

July

15th-16th July

TFGA Biennial Conference,
Launceston Tas

20th – 22nd July

NSW Farmers' Association
Conference, NSW

29th -30th July

Visitation, Yeppoon Qld and
Pineapple Field Days

29th -30th July

Pineapple Field Days, Qld

August

10th-12th August

Australian Cherry Industry
Conference, Vic