



Congratulation to Ann Lyster of Lyster Orchards Manjimup – winner of the APAL award celebrating Women in Agriculture.

POMEWEST

Report

SPRING is in the air

From industry events to a heritage trail, it's a strong start to spring for both growers and consumer activation.

Words Nardia Stacy, executive manager

THIS winter was the coldest in a decade. It resulted in abundant chill being recorded in all our production regions and sound rainfall in the majority of production areas replenishing the dams in time for the onset of the warmer weather. As trees begin to blossom, spring brings a renewed sense of hope and optimism for some positive developments in the sector.

WA Apple Heritage and Produce Trail Project

We are excited to announce our support for an Apple Heritage and Produce Trail, stretching from the Perth Hills to the South West. This initiative celebrates the apple industry and is being coordinated by Dr Helen Cripps, daughter of the late John Cripps (the horticulturist behind the Pink Lady). The trail will include oral histories from apple producers, growers, breeders and physical and digital memorabilia. Consumers will be able to access links to local growers and products from apples grown in WA via posters and plaques with QR codes. The project aims to promote the apple industry and foster a sense of pride and connection in local consumers. If you would like to contribute resources, please email Helen at h.cripps2@live.com.



Industry Connection

Pomewest held three biosecurity workshops and annual grower dinner meetings in August, covering all major growing regions, supported by Hort Innovation, the APC, DPIRD and APAL. The biosecurity sessions provided growers with critical information about the current Qfly incursion and the poly shot hole borer response. They were also guided through the APAL biosecurity risk assessment tool to create their own plans.

Gillian Reilly from Hort Innovation presented the national marketing program for apples and pears. Gillian's presentation provided the latest data to support the latest approach to promotional and marketing activities. She also spoke about the national merchandising and quality program set to elevate the presentation of apples and pears in the retail sector to assist in lifting consumption. The dinners were graced by many producers and stakeholders, leading to productive networking and interactive discussions across all regions.



Committee member and biosecurity workshop host Sam Licciardello with DPIRD's Dr Helen Spafford.

What's Up Next?

More exciting local events are coming up! We'll again showcase WA apples at the Perth Royal Show in early October, participate in the WA Horticulture Update Conference and support the Donnybrook Long Table Lunch in November, featuring WA apples and pears as the star ingredients. In addition, Pomewest will now promote the @WAApplesandPears handle directly through our social media platforms. We kindly request your help by sharing your stories with us.

“Attendees ... learned about their fee-for-service investment in two national R&D projects...”



Suzanne Hill of SW Tafe checking traps at the biosecurity workshop in Manjnimup.

In This Edition

Susie Murphy-White reports on the review of the PIPS3 project sourced from an information session in early June. We acknowledge the valuable role of female pome fruit growers in horticulture, celebrating their success in the story She'll be Apples, as well as the outcomes of the quality testing program in the past 12 months. In closing, I remind you that both Susie and I are here to assist you with any industry matters. Don't hesitate to reach out to us for help or to offer feedback to help drive our industry forward.

New R&D Projects Announced

Attendees at recent dinners learned about their fee-for-service investment in two national R&D projects that align with Pomewest's strategic plan to enhance orchard productivity and lower production costs – they are:

1 Narrow Orchard System Project (NOS)

This aims to balance human labour, mechanisation/automation and production for optimal efficiency in temperate orchard systems. The NOS concept pertains to a modern, technology-optimised orchard design that can endure unpredictable climate changes and market fluctuations.

2 Next generation of PIPS 4

This project is in three parts: production, integrated pest and disease management and soils over three years. It is commendable that Pomewest has been selected as the sub-contractor for the Building Sustainable Soils component, which aims to achieve best practices via gap identification, benchmarks and adoption and delivery demonstrating outcomes.

Pomewest will also support and collaborate with DPIRD to expand extension activities. It is anticipated that Pomewest will need to increase resources and engage a new project support officer for Pome to facilitate project objectives. 🍏

She'll be **APPLES**

We celebrate leading women who are driving the apple and pear industry forward.

Words Nardia Stacy, executive manager



Ladycroft Orchard manager Bec Whittaker and Dee Fagan tasting the fruits of their labour.

POMEWEST acknowledges and honours the remarkable women who have made significant contributions to the apple and pear industry in Western Australia. These accomplished women are prominent leaders in the industry and actively mentor other women to follow in their footsteps. They are: Susie Murphy-White (2018), Bec Whittaker (2019), Nicole Giblett (2022) and Ann Lyster and Jenny Mercer (2023).

The women listed above have all received well-deserved recognition as APAL national industry award recipients for their outstanding work as Marketers of the Year and Women in Horticulture. Meanwhile, many others have made significant contributions to the industry for many years, including Maud Williams of Lady Williams fame, as well as modern legends Joy Jarvis of Prime Organics and countless others who have dedicated decades to working in pack sheds and office management. Their contributions have been vital to the industry's ongoing success.



Past award winner
Nic Giblett, another
well recognised
leader in the industry.

Ann Lyster, a nurse-turned-orchardist, says teamwork and perseverance are behind the success of the apple industry. She praises the importance of women's skills and capabilities, citing a female trainer who works with young people on her farm as an example.

Jenny Mercer won the APAL 2023 Marketer of the Year Award for her innovative strategies for Bravo Soluna Apple's success. She used a QR code on the apple's sticker to engage consumers and offered a \$100,000 prize competition. Jenny herself admires the resilience and courage of those in the horticulture industry.

Bec Whittaker, the 2019 award-winning orchard manager of Ladycroft Orchard in Manjimup, believes that developing a well-rounded team involves training and encouraging both male and female team members. Bec has strategically created a balanced team of young men and women who perform various roles across the organisation. Her quick sense of humour, enthusiasm and ability to identify and implement new opportunities make her an exceptional manager for Ladycroft, which is owned by one of Western Australia's largest pome and stonefruit growers, the Casotti Group.

Nic Giblett is another exemplary advocate for the WA fruit-growing industry. With a strong passion and unwavering dedication, she is the voice for the sector, highlighting issues and attributes on behalf of the local industry. One of her most outstanding achievements is implementing a successful program to bring seasonal workers from Tonga to Newton Orchards, her family business. This initiative has significantly increased the efficiency of the orchard and provided them with a reliable and skilled workforce. Nic acknowledges the critical role that Tongan workers play in the success of Newton Orchards, stating that: "They are incredible in the way they work."

We are thrilled to shine the spotlight on all our women in pome in this edition. Thank you all for the exceptional work you have done and continue to do. Your efforts are a great inspiration to all in the horticultural industry. 🍏

MORE INFORMATION

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“Ann Lyster, a nurse-turned orchardist, says teamwork and perseverance are behind the success of the pome industry”



Ann Lyster and Jenny Mercer: 2023 APAL national award winners.

Researcher ROADSHOW

PIPS3 has just finished a whirlwind national tour – catch up on the insights from this research project.

Words Susie Murphy-White, project manager

BELOW Orchard discussion at the WA PIPS3 researcher roadshow at the Fontanini Orchard in Manjimup.



THE Productivity Irrigation Pests and Soils (PIPS3) Program has completed a national roadshow across apple- and pear-growing. It was rolled out to extend national and local outcomes of research, development and demonstration activities undertaken over the past three years. It began in late March at Agriculture Victoria’s Tatura SmartFarm Horticulture Field Day (with the theme ‘Future-proofing Horticulture in a Changing Climate’) and finished at the Fruit Growers Tasmania Conference (with the theme ‘Sustainable Profitability’) in Launceston, with regional events held at Nashdale (NSW), Lenswood (SA), Manjimup (WA) and Rookwood (Tas).

PIPS3 program coordinator Marguerite White says the interest shown by growers and advisors across the country demonstrate they are keen to hear directly from the researchers and consultants delivering the projects.

“The events were a great opportunity for open and practical discussion. The less formal regional events were PowerPoint free, allowing everyone to get into the orchard for some great chats,” says Marguerite. “The researchers introduced the key learnings and messages from investigation and trials over the past three years. Locals swiftly applied these to their own orchard systems and growing

conditions, such as climate, soil type, water availability, pests and weeds, and fruit varieties and rootstocks.”

Soil Health and Nutrition

Dr Nigel Swarts (TIA) and regional facilitators of the PIPS3 soil health and nutrition project (AP19006) demonstration sites, including myself (Manjimup, WA), presented on the inter-row and tree-line management trials that were implemented from 2020 to 2023. Across the sites, varying treatments have resulted in management challenges and some initial correlation with fruit quality and soil health benefits. However, the key message was

soil health changes take time and most demonstrates sites will be continued in PIPS4. Demonstration site host Bec Whittaker, of Ladycroft Orchard Manjimup, provided insight into her team's observations and management experiences of the sites over the past three years. There was agreement the legume grass mixes provided the best coverage for tractability and beneficial changes to the physical properties of soil in the interrow were observed, with natives being the most difficult to establish. Under the tree line, although different products were used, the application of organic compost saw leaves held on the trees for longer across the three sites. However, cost became a discussion.

Climate Issues

Climate challenges were a strong focus. Dr Ian Goodwin discussed the impacts of heat and sunburn on fruit quality and colour development, and the pros and cons of mitigation managements using netting, evaporative cooling and row orientation. Work on the impact of crop load on fruit yield and quality, and ways to avoid biennial bearing, were also presented and discussed. He shared data on fruit set number and fruit weight across varying light interception ranges in pears, and the way in which sensing technology can be used to determine crop load targets.

AgTech Support

The use of AgTech in the orchard and making management decisions with support platforms was a popular discussion point across all events. Dr Ian Goodwin discussed the results of assessing the 'Cartographer' as a useful rapid orchard assessment tool in the orchard as part of the apple and pear systems projects (AP19003 & AP19005), led by Agriculture

Victoria Research. The mobile sensing platform was calibrated and validated to measure and map flower cluster number, fruit number, fruit size, fruit colour and tree size, and advise on crop load distribution in an orchard in PIPS3. He demonstrated its benefits in providing accurate block data on the variability of fruit number and pre-harvest forecasting of fruit distribution and yield, and highlighted potential for improved decision-making in other spatial operations, such as thinning, pruning, leaf blowing and variable rate spraying.

Dr Nigel Swarts demonstrated developments made to the SINATA tool (Strategic Irrigation and Nitrogen Assessment Tool for Apples) in PIPS3 (AP19006). The excel-based tool has been integrated into the irrigation and nutrition precision online software SWAN Systems to function as a forecasting and scheduling tool, using real-time weather data. The prototype was trialled by leading growers in each region in WA, including at the Joe Fontanini Orchard, which shared its experiences at the PIPS3 event in making decisions using the data and mapping generated. SWAN Systems also had representatives on the tool in both SA and WA.

IPD Management

The PIPS3 Integrated Pest and Disease Management (IPDM)

project (AP19002), which was led by Greg Lefoe and his team at Agriculture Victoria Research, and Steve Quarrell at TIA, investigated creating environments more conducive to beneficials in the inter-row, tree-line and surrounding landscape of orchards, and taking an integrated approach to managing pests to reduce reliance upon, and resistance to, chemicals.

It was valuable to have grower-led discussion on their management decisions, especially the ways in which they are transitioning to more sustainable practises, and the mind-set challenge this also raises for them, especially the concept of a 'tidy' orchard.

PIPS4 Announced

Pomewest has been sub-contracted for the fourth PIPS iteration of the PIPS program: PIPS4 for Profit. The program will focus on strengthening orchard profitability. Each project will focus on a research area and will propose the economic improvement \$/ha to be tested as a gross margin analysis. PIPS4 for Profit is funded by Hort Innovation, using the apple and pear research and development levy, for the next five years. 🍏

MORE INFORMATION

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Thank you!

The PIPS3 Program team thanks Bec Whittaker, Manjimup (Soil Health Orchard Floor Demonstration Sites) and Joe Fontanini, Manjimup (SWAN Systems [SINATA] Trial and Event Host). The program was funded by Hort Innovation, using the apple and pear research and development levy, contributions from the Australian Government and co-investment from Agriculture Victoria and the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture.



Quality COUNTS

Industry testing shows that apple maturity is trending up, creating satisfaction for growers and better taste for consumers.

Words Nardia Stacy, executive manager

CHRIS Hall, proprietor of Total Quality Assurance Systems (TQAS), has provided Pomewest with an annual milestone report on the results of the maturity testing program for the 2022/2023 season. As you know, this program is in place to improve the quality of WA apples to meet consumers' taste preferences. Pomewest has been supporting this program since 2018, and it is ongoing. The test results are sent to Pomewest weekly and shared with growers, marketers and retailers. Below are the observations and results from the June 2023 Milestone report.

In the past year, TQAS has collected 470 samples of apple lines from various agents at Canning Vale Market City,

wholesalers and retail outlets, including major chain stores, Spud Sheds, IGAs and other independently owned fruit and vegetable outlets. These areas included both the Perth metro and some regional areas of WA. Digital refractometers were used to measure sugar levels (Brix) and digital pressure meters were used to measure fruit pressures (Kgf). Starch levels were determined by observing iodine solution staining against the industry's colour charts for each apple variety.

The new season fruit production was monitored from the Perth Hills growing region, starting on February 2, 2023. Unfortunately, the initial delivery of Gala apples to the market failed both the brix and the starch tests. This is in line

with previous seasons, with early delivered consignments being noticeably close to the minimum standards required. As the season progressed, Gala consignments were inconsistent in brix levels and some had low starch levels.

From wholesale, TQAS collected 174 samples. The analysis of the samples tested showed that: 169, or 97.1 per cent of samples collected, passed the minimum brix specifications; 172, or 98.8 per cent of samples collected, passed the minimum pressure specifications; 90, or 93.8 per cent of 96 starch tests conducted, passed the minimum starch specification; and 10, or 5.8 per cent, failed one or more tests.

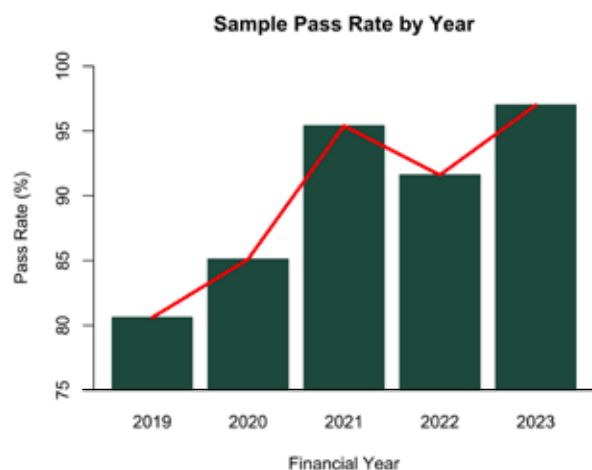
From retail, 295 samples were collected. The analysis showed that: 294, or 99.7 per cent, of samples collected, passed the minimum brix specifications; 293, or 99.3 per cent of samples collected, passed the minimum pressure specifications; 29, or 93.5 per cent of 31 starch tests conducted, passed the minimum starch specifications; a total of four, or 1.36 per cent, of samples failed one or more tests.

Key Performance Indicators

The good news for the industry was fruit quality had generally improved compared to previous years, and taste predictors tended to be more acceptable regarding sugar (brix) levels. TQAS has monitored fruit at all points of sale to ensure its quality at retail. Comprehensive testing results show 97 per cent of samples passed all three maturity specifications. This is an increase on previous seasons. As a result of evaluations, only 14 lines were found to be below the minimum standards. Some lines failed more than one component of the standards.

Five-Year Trend

Over the past five years, there has been a consistent decrease in the percentage of lines failing the three maturity indexes (see table below). This result is in line with the strategic plan of Pomewest to enhance the quality of fruit in Western Australia and ensure consistent quality for consumers. These outcomes are consistent with the current scope and objectives.



Further Observations

This year TQAS observed mixed maturity within many samples. This was observed more in early season, but was not limited to:

- Higher starch levels in Gala varieties related to lower brix levels in early harvested lines
- Generally brix levels were lower at wholesale than at retail
- There was a significantly higher percentage of fails at wholesale for starch levels
- Pressure fails at retail were much lower this period than observed in prior seasons
- As observed in the 2021/22 season, all Granny Smith and Pink Lady samples passed all tests at retail.

A copy of the full report is available to FFS apple and pear growers. 🍏

MORE INFORMATION + FULL REPORT

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Budgeted income 2023–24

Project	\$
General Account Budget including FFS, Interest, Project Grant Funding	430,000
Biosecurity Account Budget FFS, general account transfers and interest	76,250

Budgeted expenditure general account 2023–24

Project	\$
Quality Testing Project	35,200
Narrow Orchard System Project	20,000
PIPS4	9,000
RIM Disease Modelling Systems	5,400
Apple and Pear Heritage Trail Project	5,000
Promotion and Publicity	28,000
Event Sponsorship	6,000
Annual Meetings and Communications	15,000
Admin, including salaries and office costs	263,200
APC Admin Charge @ 11% of FFS budgeted Income	46,200
Total	433,000

Budgeted expenditure biosecurity account 2023–24

Project	\$
Codling moth	35,000
On-farm preparedness workshops	10,000
APC charge @11% of FFS budgeted Income	4,400
Total	49,400

APC fee-for-service charge

Pome fruit effective from 1 January 2015

Type of fruit	\$/kg
Fresh fruit – apples, pears, Nashi, other	0.015
Processing fruit	0.005
Biosecurity FFS for fresh fruit	0.002
Biosecurity FFS for processing fruit	0.001

