

PESTS BEWARE!



THIS NURSERY IS ... Very Clean and Green

AUSTRALIA'S AGRICULTURAL industries are beset by pests and disease which take constant vigil to control. But a fruit tree nursery in Woombye on the Sunshine Coast hinterland has just been awarded an international biosecure creditation – creditation based on the international Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) risk management system - the first such nursery in Australia. It means this local business can minimise their future pest, disease and weed risks - a great boost for product marketing and their bottom line.

Birdwood Nursery Director, Peter Young and Technical Manager, Denis Roe spoke with the Hinterland Times about their new accreditation.

Birdwood Nursery produces fruit trees and supplies about 64 per cent of these to commercial growers with the balance to the retail sector like Bunnings, Big W and independent garden centres.

Their biggest line is avocados with citrus, mangoes, cusk-apples, low-chill tropical stone fruit trees, with other subtropical and tropical fruit trees making up the rest.

The nursery tests and trials new fruit varieties before they go out to clients. This is a time-consuming process with research and development taking at least six years to get results. Peter Young created the nursery 33 years ago following a career as an extension officer with the Department of Primary Industries. He says the nursery is now reaping the benefits of stock they created 15-20 years ago.

Peter explains how consumer markets change. For example, they have created new cultivars that will supply fruit for early or late seasons depending on the required market windows in the different states.

"Also large fruit used to be all the go," says Peter. "Now, it gets wasted if you want to give children an apple in their lunch box. You can't close it if it is too big. So some fruit is getting smaller and we even have seedless mandarins."

"What we try and do is look at the opportunities on the marketing side and then work backwards to see what product we need to create. Our business is partly based on outcomes. 70 per cent of our product here is grown after it is ordered and we have had a strong record of providing good quality trees. Our new accreditation just continues that trend towards protection of our product."



Above: Birdwood Nursery operations are strictly controlled. Any vehicle entering the site must be checked for cleanliness and hosed down if necessary.



Left: Denis Roe and Peter Young hold one of their grafted fruit trees - a Columbian Dragon Fruit 'Pitaya'.

Birdwood specialises in adapting fruit trees to particular growing seasons and making them drought tolerant and pest resistant.

We are the first nursery in Australia," adds Peter, "to receive BioSecure HACCP, which is Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point. It is basically a system to prevent disease coming into our nursery. If a new disease came in here it could break us, especially if we had to be quarantined for the minimum period of twelve weeks."

"When you drive into Birdwood Nursery what you notice are the many signs that remind visitors that this is a biosecure area with a strong emphasis on hygiene. There is a separate quarantine area where they inspect anything coming into the nursery for insect pests or diseases, and if necessary spray them with insecticides or pesticides."

So what does HACCP do for the business? Denis explains, "The benefit of accreditation with the BioSecure HACCP

system is that all the pest and disease in the nursery can be managed and minimised. In future, for interstate shipments, the administration and inspection of those plants could actually be done by the nursery itself. WA has been one of our biggest markets in the past. Trying to send product to WA is like trying to export overseas because they are so isolated from diseases on the east coast. The HACCP accreditation will make that administration and inspection process much easier in the future."

In a creative business where creating a fruit tree can take 12-24 months from seed to grafted tree, the people at Birdwood Nursery are proud of their high quality and products that are guaranteed for up to 40 years.