



Harvest 22 Tech Update

October 30, 2022

After a stuttering start to the season, a week or two behind, nearly all growers are moving through the gears as the volumes start to ramp up. This has been due to mixed weather conditions with lots of cloud and humidity coupled with generally cool temperatures. Blueberries don't flourish in low light.

Despite that, it's been a good start. Given the high levels of botrytis inoculum seen on most orchards it's been pleasing to see only limited negative feedback from the marketplace thus far. All of the effort and hard work put in to keep quality up seems to be paying off at the moment.

However, as pressure on time and resources ramps up, with an ever-increasing workload from the demands of the harvest, it's important to keep up good growing practise. The visit from the MBO agronomists reminded us of how important it is to keep up all the basics if we are to expect good results.

Action points:

1) Manage air temperatures

All tunnels should be vented by now if possible. At the very least window venting, where every 4th or 5th hoop is vented (ie plastic pulled up around 1m to allow air movement). Full venting along the whole tunnel is better and currently recommended. Venting creates air movement by convection and makes a surprising difference to temperatures within the tunnels to the benefit of both fruit and pickers. Only a severe weather event with high wind and high rainfall would trigger pulling down the plastic before the end of summer. Also consider earlier starts when the temperature lifts.

2) Rapid transit of harvested fruit to cool room

Getting the fruit as quickly as possible to the coolroom is one of the most powerful tools to improve quality and shelf life and avoid fluffy berries showing up in punnets on customers shelves. There are pragmatic, practical considerations with the logistics of harvest, but please, have a mindset of 'into the coolroom ASAP'. 30 minutes from picked berry to coolstore is the goal - 20 minutes would secure a nomination for 'Grower of the month'. It often takes longer than you think. Our summer student, Annie Reid, will be tracking some berries using data loggers from picking through to coolstore through to packhouse. Also additional tracking all the way through to our endpoint domestic and export customers

The cooler the berries are in the coolroom and through transit to the packhouse the lesser the risk of claims. Well done for those growers with a 'precooler forced air' arrangement in the on orchard cool room.

3) Irrigation Frequency

Simple message – a little bit of runoff every day.

In detail, this corresponds to 10-15% run off percentage. Spring conditions have temperatures and humidity fluctuating significantly so this requires close monitoring. Better to have the occasional

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50% runoff than days on end with no runoff if adjustments have not been made for higher temperatures, stronger sun and longer days.

Too much irrigation can lead to loss of taste, watery fruit and even split fruit. Tasting and observation required to hit the right balance.

4) EC Levels

There is a lot going on with these MBO Southern Highbush currently. Not only are they putting all the resources they can into producing plenty of fruit, but they also push new vegetative growth from buds below the fruiting buds. Therefore, they really need fuel. They do draw on stores of carbohydrate stored away in large branches and roots. However, they also benefit from the nutrient provided. EC levels can be raised progressively over the harvest building to EC1.4 or 1.5 by the end of the harvest. Higher EC also counters tasteless fruit.

5) Post-Harvest time irrigation maintenance

Flowing on from higher EC's does require some thinking and forward planning for when the harvest is complete, and bushes are pruned. Pots will probably require flushing at this point. It's also the best time to add a specialist wetting agent (eg Hydraflo L) to the pots and carry out dripper maintenance with acid and/or peroxide. After three or four seasons, we are starting to see growers struggling with blocked drippers that are causing big problems.



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