

Benefits from the Levy System

SPOTLIGHT > APPLES AND PEARS

Apple grower lifts orchard productivity



(Above) Apple growers Nicola and Robert Green.

South Australian apple grower Robert Green and winner of the 2014 Farmer of the Year award has achieved more than 100 tonnes per hectare yield in some of his orchard blocks – more than twice the industry average.

Robert credits the Future Orchards® program for helping him see how he could lift production in his orchard.

“I’ve been vocal in my support for the Future Orchards program,” said Robert. “I think it’s been one of the better programs in terms of growers’ levy money spent and its value and return on investment. They offer you access to a lot of things, but you do have to get in there and use the tools; if you choose not to use it you may not get much back out of the program.”

Future Orchards helps growers increase production, lower orchard production costs per kilogram of fruit, increase the percentage of premium fruit harvested and bring Australian orchardists up to international competitiveness in the domestic and export markets. It provides growers with practical and hands on education that include regular orchard walks (held twice a year in each of the eight growing regions) and access to comprehensive notes, webinars and orchard information online.

Robert’s orchard is constantly changing and that is perhaps the foundation of his success – constant trial, adaption, adoption and improvement.

“It’s really important to have growers like Robert who can act as mentors and are willing to try new

approaches to demonstrate how best management practices can boost orchard performance,” says John Dollisson, CEO of Apple and Pear Australia Ltd (APAL), which manages Future Orchards.

In his nomination for the Farmer of the Year award Robert was described as “a skilled and intuitive grower with an approach to orcharding that combines science and mechanics and a willingness to embrace change and risks to improve orchard outcomes”.

One part of Future Orchards that Robert was involved with was a research trial to reduce biennial bearing in apple trees. This aimed to help apple trees produce an even crop year after year, rather than cycling from one ‘good’ year to one less productive year.



The national average yield for apple production is around 41 tonnes per hectare, whereas Robert has achieved in excess of 100 tonnes a hectare on some blocks and many in the 50-85 range. Moreover he has pack-out rates (the percentage of fruit picked that goes to first class fruit) of 80 per cent, compared to the national average of 67 per cent.

Robert sees the productivity bar having been lifted across Australia over the last six or eight years and he attributes much of this to Future Orchards.

Robert is engaged with both the local and national growing communities and has generously donated his time and expertise to share his knowledge and experiences of implementing modern orcharding techniques with other growers.

APAL’s Future Orchards program is funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Ltd (HIA) using the apple and pear industry levies paid by apple and pear growers, with matched funds from the Australian Government. AgFirst is a key strategic partner in the delivery of Future Orchards®.

To view more grower stories highlighting the success of Horticulture Levy investments to date visit the Voice of Horticulture website > <http://voiceofhorticulture.org.au/>