



All-round benefits in automated fertigation for Goodwood avocados

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INVESTING in automated irrigation and fertigation has transformed the avocado growing system on the Peirson Memorial Trust property at Goodwood, near Childers in Queensland.

Manager Laurie McCloskey said the system had resulted in fully automated programming, easier delivery of fertilisers, enormous labour savings and better production responses.

Laurie has been growing avocados for 17 years and has chalked up 16 years (including 14 as Manager) on the 725-hectare property, which has 85ha under avocado production and 245ha of sugarcane.

Soil and sap testing from the orchard is performed twice a year by the AgVita Analytical laboratory in Tasmania to assist the nutritional program and after previously using "straight" fertilisers, Laurie has been applying blended products since late last year.

"We are injecting potassium sulphate, potassium nitrate and calcium nitrate, as well as a little bit of boron and trace elements all the time," Laurie said.

"We started using two different blends last September. We use a higher N (nitrogen), lower K (potassium) blend at the start and then a higher K blend after the first fruit drop."

Haifa's Poly-Feed 18-19-19 fertiliser has been applied and Lindsay Rural's 'Banana One-Shot' product, which offers higher potassium levels and good trace elements, also has been used to deliver essential nutrients identified in the laboratory analysis.

The fully water soluble Banana One-Shot fertiliser is based on the Haifa Poly-Feed product, which comprises pure plant nutrients and generous quantities of essential micro-elements such as magnesium, boron and zinc.

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Queensland avocado grower Laurie McCloskey, Lindsay Rural Bundaberg Branch Manager Les Loney and Haifa Australia Sales Agronomist Peter Anderson discuss the nutritional requirements of the avocado orchard on the Peirson Memorial Trust property at Goodwood, near Childers.

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Pioneering the Future

Banana One-Shot contains 13 per cent nitrogen, just 0.17pc phosphorus, a high 24pc potassium, 8.7pc sulphur and 2.1pc magnesium.

"The solubility of the Haifa fertilisers has been excellent and the job of applying fertilisers is now so much easier," Laurie said.

"We put one lot (of fertiliser) in, then the next and away we go.

"We are not paying someone else to mix fertiliser and there is now no confusion in the product. There is no risk in sending someone to do the fertiliser application and them getting it wrong.

"And we have definitely picked up a response (in the orchard).

"We are putting less on, more often. We used to inject everything in 40 minutes – now we can do it over a number of hours."

The fertiliser program also includes broadcasting of a custom blend at one kilogram/ha around Christmas.

The property's Shepard avocados are picked from mid-March, while picking of the Hass variety extends from April through to August.

Laurie said the fully automated, radio-based irrigation system had been a major bonus.

"The labour savings are unbelievable."

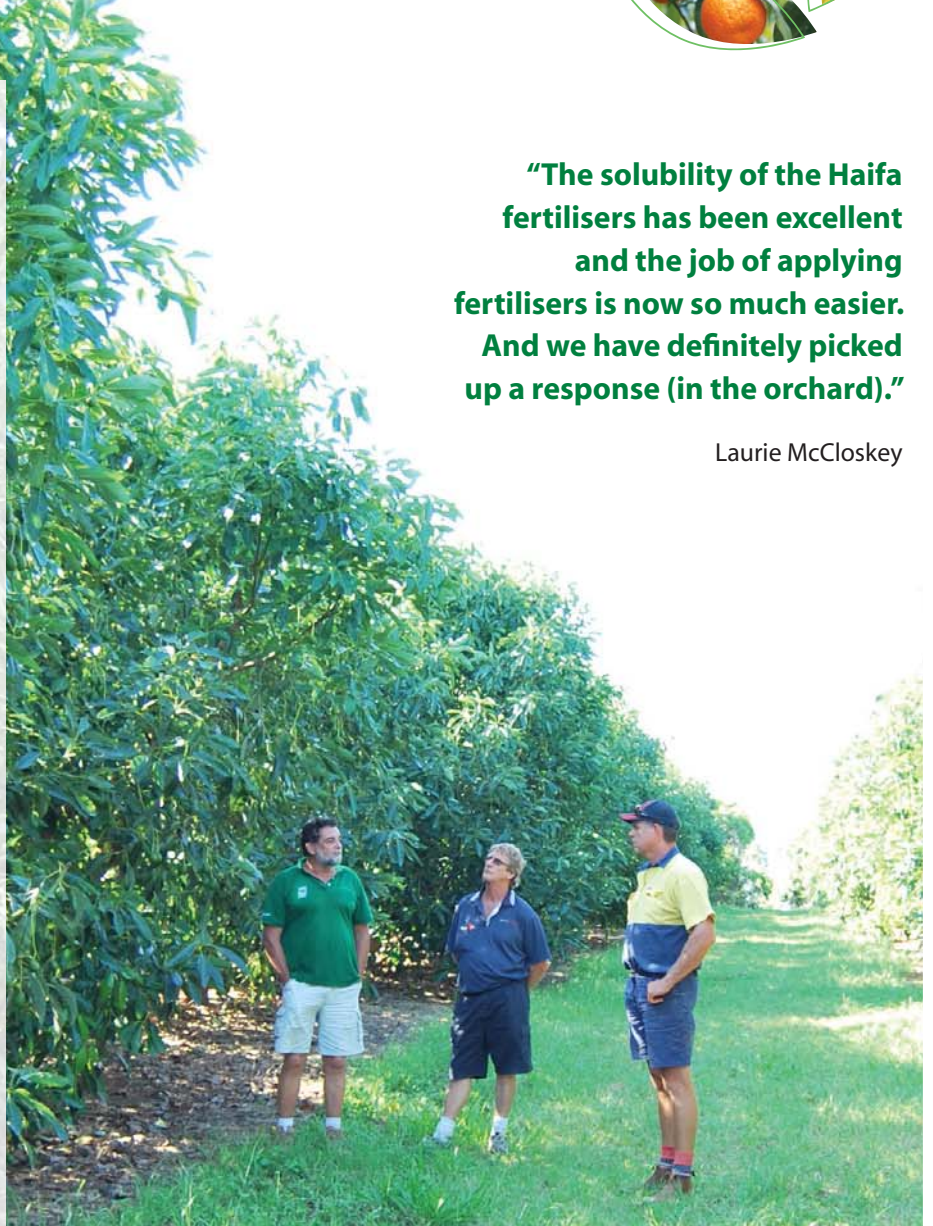
"It is cheaper for us to water after 7pm and I was sick of waking up at 2am to run around turning valves on and off.

"We water twice a week for four hours and we look at six to eight hours depending on the conditions.

"All irrigation information goes back to the computer in the shed and I can log onto that through the iPad," he said.

"The solubility of the Haifa fertilisers has been excellent and the job of applying fertilisers is now so much easier. And we have definitely picked up a response (in the orchard)."

Laurie McCloskey



Laurie takes Les and Peter through the workings of his automated fertigation system.