



Every four years the New Zealand and Australian avocado industries get together and organise a joint conference. This is indeed good – and for a number of reasons. Getting together demonstrates that the two industries can, and do, work together when there is clearly a benefit for growers. Combining resources makes it possible to host a truly better conference. It is possible to bring a decent number of leading avocado researchers and academics from around the world to the conference. Listening to their views, seeing their research results and sharing their experiences is enriching especially in an environment where strong views can and are, tempered by other strong views. Debate is healthy and encouraged. The conference atmosphere is therefore exciting, charged and carries an air of expectancy. The unfortunate reality also is that there are less and less scientists making a lifetime career out of avocado research. Each year the number contracts a little more as the older generation of avocado scientists retires. On a global scale the amount, both depth and breadth, of avocado research is in decline. Governments are less and less inclined to invest in sector research so the entire burden of avocado research is now borne by avocado growers and other sector stakeholders. Is this trend likely to change – no!

We do live in a global world. It shows in the country list of conference delegates and speakers. The 2005 conference will be attended by growers and scientists from a number of countries from obviously, Australia and New Zealand, but also from South Africa, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Peru, the USA, Spain and Israel. The Avocado Marketers and Producers Working Group representing 10 countries will host their annual meeting during the conference. Production and marketing “secrets” are almost impossible to keep. Rather, we now live in a world of information exchange and cooperation. This is evident in New Zealand too. Examples are exporters working together to better satisfy markets, and customers and growers working together in discussion groups to improve their production. At an industry level New Zealand publishes, for example, an *Annual Research Report* and exchanges that information with other countries. In return we access other countries’ research results.

This conference will be about sharing. I do not believe that anyone attends a conference such as this and then does not actively engage in the spirit of cooperation and sharing. Some of the presentations at this conference have the potential to add real and long-term value to growers at both a production and a marketing level. To gain some of this benefit you need to be there, interacting and engaging in discussion with people from other avocado producing countries. We also really need to learn. Our national yield has fallen for four straight years to a low of less than 5 tons per ha in the 2004/5 year. We are competing against some countries that regularly achieve national average yield of 10 tons per ha. In a freer world with less border protection we would be out-competed based on our existing yields. There are some interesting sessions, and some very good speakers, planned for this conference that will deal with

factors affecting yield. There is also a session devoted to technical transfer, extension and why adult education, especially when it comes to farmers and orchardists, is so very hard – and largely unsuccessful!

There are three talks on new cultivars, rootstocks, avocado breeding and germplasm in general. Suddenly this is of great interest to New Zealand, as we now finally have access to quarantine facilities and can begin importing some of this new material. In fact the first of the new cultivar accessions has begun. Four cultivar imports were made in January and February this year. How will they stack up in New Zealand? We may get some pointers from people in the know like Stefan Kohne, Guy Witney and Tony Whiley.

As you have heard so many times in the past, and it must at times sound like a stuck record, *we live in a global world*. Trade barriers and borders are being dismantled at a rapid and sometimes frightening pace. Free trade deals and WTO negotiating rounds are on various governments agendas. New Zealand is out in front charging around in this area. Avocados are a global commodity and the lessons about commodities and over and under supply are being re-discovered and re-learned in the big global markets of Europe and the USA. The Avocado Marketers and Producers Working Group (AMAPWG) members will be presenters at the conference. Their views and ideas are provocative and interesting. Some of their efforts to share market information and collectively build consumption are laudable and encouraging. We will have the opportunity to hear their collective and individual views for the world avocado market place going forward. No doubt, our keynote speaker Jim Donovan, from Mission Produce in the USA, will build on this topic as we consider an exciting and daunting future global supply just as our own volumes really start to build. Equally as important, our own exporters will be presenting their ideas for the future marketing of avocados and the associated financial well-being of New Zealand avocado growers.

When it comes down to producing avocados in the orchard, it often comes down to the weather having the final say. It is just part of the risk involved in the growing of avocados. In New Zealand we have had a bad weather run for the past few seasons, especially at fruit set time in the spring. How real is climate change and what does it mean for the weather? Un-seasonal and severe floods, colder springs, melting ice shelves, global warming, dry and hot summers - there are lots of theories and views and at times we probably think that we don't really know. There is a presentation from our other keynote speaker, Australian Peter Deuter, who will be looking at climate and weather expectations for the next 25 years for our neck of the woods!

Our own scientists and researchers will be presenting their results. How good are they and are they doing valuable, high quality and relevant work? This will be the opportunity to compare them to some of their international colleagues. Unfortunately, they will only be able to orally present a small selection of their work. However to ensure that the breadth of the work is recognised and appreciated the research team will present up to 10 posters at the conference.

This conference is a must if you are serious about avocados. The conference organising committee is doing a great job. Get in early and secure your place and enjoy and learn from what should be a wonderful conference experience.