

Big decision to be put to members

Since our last newsletter the possibility of sourcing new walnut varieties from overseas has become much more real.

It's now clear that importing varieties is practical—though expensive and there's some financial risk.

The research sub-committee is continuing to gather more information and NZWIG will ask the membership for a decision at the annual general meeting in June.

Feedback from members in our questionnaires has often included requests to keep looking for new varieties. At present some 85 to 90 per cent of the commercial plantings in New Zealand are Rex and Meyric, though we already have nine other selections under trial in four locations around the country. We have not had access to new high-yielding cultivars bred overseas.

The hazards of importing mean that we would need to use the highest, most stringent level of quarantine if we were to import new varieties as bare-rooted plants or as scion wood to be grafted on to rootstock in quarantine.

There's another option. Our research team is in contact with a laboratory that could put our target cultivars in tissue culture overseas, quarantine them in New Zealand and develop plantlets from the cultures. We understand that it is easier to ensure pest and disease-free plants when working with tissue culture rather than nursery stock.

As an industry group we need to decide whether we want to import new varieties or rely on what we have. We need to decide whether we want to commit what will certainly be a significant proportion our funds to one project.



NZWIG members on a recent North Island tour. Diana Loader, shows the visitors around her property which has 600 walnut trees, including some in the trial of new varieties. The party also visited a macadamia processing plant near New Plymouth and were impressed by the standard of the operation. They called in on a property near Wanganui with 100-year-old walnut trees that were producing about 60kg per tree and had very little blight. They also visited Vern Harrison near Palmerston North. Vern was one of the first propagators to graft walnuts. See our website for information about more NZWIG events.

Make the best use of your NZWIG membership

Your membership of New Zealand Walnut Industry Group may be the best investment you could make in your commercial walnut venture.

Consider the opportunities...

- Visit the website for information about walnut growing, including our research projects
- Attend an event—a field demonstration or a tour of another region
- Read the New Zealand Walnut Growers Manual—written by experienced members and technical specialists
- Talk to other members for advice and to share your experience with walnuts
- Attend the AGM to discuss the most

significant issues for your industry and help decide its future

- Lobby to get yourself elected to the committee of NZWIG at the AGM
- Read your copy of *Health in a Shell*. It's published quarterly on behalf of Nut Industries of NZ and distributed to NZWIG members
- Contribute to our new *Chatzone* on the website. It's a chance to have your say.
- Get together with growers to become a voice for your region. Keep in touch with the committee of NZWIG.
- Join a subcommittee or volunteer to help out with events, research or communicating with members.

New appointment for benchmarking project

NZWIG has appointed a field-worker for our benchmarking project.

Ivan Barnett has a background in farming and also works at the Biological Husbandry Unit at Lincoln.

Ivan's appointment will help us increase the number of orchards taking part in the benchmarking project.

Initially, Ivan will be following up the recent blight count by asking growers about their management practices. He will coordinate the next phase, a study of yield data about the end of April, then measurements of tree growth between May and June.

Blight counters busy

Blight researchers have been out checking the prevalence of our most significant management challenge.

TreeCropper reports that NZ Tree Crops Association members recording blight levels in Waikato found that Shannon was by far the most blight resistant of seven varieties they tested. The walnuts were on Nick Empson's organic property at Pirongia.

The group found Serr to be the most prone to blight, though in a low blight season it could easily out produce the other varieties.

In Canterbury, members of NZWIG's research team did their annual mid-January assessment and found a very significant difference in the incidence of blight on Rex and Meyric with Rex averaging less than 20 per cent and Meyric more than 40 per cent.

The team had to accept a smaller sample this year because a severe frost in mid-October cut production and there were fewer orchards with enough walnuts to count. The project's coordinator Graeme Nicholas says they counted the incidence of blight and estimated the potential yield, but need to go back to calibrate the actual yield at harvest time.

NZWIG Website updated and expanded

Our webmaster, Graeme Nicholas, has been making some significant changes to our website.

In the last few months Graeme has added events to the front page and updated the Walnut industry information.

Pack for new growers and set up our new *Chatzone*—an opportunity for members to exchange ideas, experiences and information. "Anyone can join in", Graeme says. "The only restriction is that the content needs to be related to the aims of NZWIG — so useful to

members in developing the industry and improving best practice."

You can also use the NZWIG site to access a programme to work out the best time to spray for walnut blight next growing season. There's an Excel spreadsheet and you add information on the current temperature, humidity and rainfall. (The information is available from NIWA's site which is constantly updated.) Our new programme is the result of work by our Research sub-committee and Dr Tim Jenkins.

Check out the site today.

www.walnuts.org.nz

NZWIG keen to do more for propagators

The NZWIG committee is conscious that we need good communication with walnut propagators. We also want to encourage propagators and nut growers to exchange their expertise.

One of the priority areas over the coming year will be to include items of interest to propagators in our newsletters and field days.

NZWIG's propagator liaison officer, Grant Rasmussen is committed to increasing dialogue with propagators.

"There are a number of exciting developments WIG is undertaking that will benefit both propagators and growers," says Grant. "The experience of propagators will be beneficial in the development of the trials.

"Propagators have historically supported NZWIG through their generous sponsorship of the walnut levy system. NZWIG is committed to repaying that commitment where possible."

The NZWIG committee would like propagators to tell us more about their needs. Contact Grant at grantrasmussen@xtra.co.nz

Contacts

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Website

Graeme Nicholas

Newsletter

Ralph Brown

Interest in NZWIG

TreeCropper—the journal of the NZ Tree Crops Association recently published articles about our industry—including an overview of our research and another about our success so far.

We've reprinted them for you, with the permission of NZTCA.

Ready to contribute?

We need more volunteers. Consider joining one of our committees as a co-opted member to help organise an event, work on a research project or contribute to our quality team.

Have your renewed your NZWIG subscription yet?