

Horticulture with more than the slip, slop, slap approach

A safe spray on sunscreen that is producing better fruit and vegetables

WITH so many things out there that ruin crops, probably the last one you would think of is the sun. Peter Sanderson reports:

The sun is our friend right?

If you couple summer heat waves with dry weather and a nice hole in the ozone layer, you reach the number one problem for some growers, sun-burnt fruit and vegetables.

It's estimated that 20 to 40% of non-protected crops are damaged by sunburn. Because supermarkets are getting fussy nowadays, always wanting TV perfect fruit and vegetables, growers are finding it hard to sell this 'damaged' produce. Hence the incentive to develop sun protection for produce.

Crop Care, a Brisbane based company, is distributing a sunscreen from the USA. It was developed by Purfresh for the State's apple industry. David Cope, CEO of Purfresh and Patrick Gibbons, Global Marketing Consultant have been visiting Australia to show our farmers the benefits of using sunscreen on plants. But can this invention handle our Aussie heat? Apparently it can.

According to Kerrie Mackay from Crop Care, "the response to the product has been outstanding because it's so much easier to use compared to other sunscreen products out there.

"This sunscreen is a liquid and growers are finding it easy



Sunscreen being sprayed on fruit at Bon View Orchard at Officer in Victoria.

"This sunscreen is a liquid and growers are finding it easy to mix up. We've had it applied to capsicums, tomatoes, apples, mangoes, citrus, avocados, olives, melons and wine grapes."

to the untreated."

The Northern half of Australia often gets sun stress but it turns out other parts of the country are seeing the benefits of 'Liquid Parasols'.

"Some of the bigger wineries in Victoria have been using it as well as pear and apple growers in South Australia.

We just shipped some off to Tasmania the other day actually."

It may be cold and rainy in southern Australia, but it turns out Purfresh can help in that department too.

"Sunscreen not only protects the vegetables and fruit from the sun, but it also protects them from water stress which helps the growers who are having water problems because they don't have to irrigate as much."

But are companies making up the money they spend on Purfresh's wonder spray?

"Absolutely. We inspected some apple orchards today in Shepparton where they could have lost 40 to 50% of the crops just from severe weather conditions. It seems the money they've made back with a higher yield makes the cost of the sunscreen to be insignificant.

And the quality of the fruit and vegetables increases so we can get more export grade apples instead of just sending them to the juicer."

It will be interesting to see how far this new product can go. If sunscreen can give fruit and vegetables a celebrity look, maybe I can use some too.

to mix up. We've had it applied to capsicums, tomatoes, apples, mangoes, citrus, avocados, olives, melons and wine grapes. Growers love it because they

know they will get higher yield due to the protection."

Fruit and vegetables of course still need sunlight to grow. The sunscreen, which is appropriately named 'Liquid

Parasol' blocks out the damaging part of the sunlight spectrum, while still allowing beneficial rays to reach the fruit. It is another spray for our plants though, so we asked Kerrie if environmental groups might have a problem.

"This is actually a food grade product, completely safe to use on crops and also

compatible with other chemical sprays, which growers like."

It seems as if everyone is getting a lot of use out of this new protection.

"We had a call the other day from a capsicum grower in Bowen who said he's picked an extra 8% off the treated crops compared

What is the sunscreen?

Parasol is a calcium carbonate colloidal liquid sunscreen for produce.

The easy to use liquid, which can be mixed with most chemicals and sprayed on apples, tomatoes, onions, citrus and other produce four to ten times a season for UV protection.

It is made from microcrystalline calcium carbonate which is the same nontoxic white powder used on the outside of chewing gum.



Bowen farmer Gary Muller gives credit to the sunscreen for his excellent crop of capsicums.



Non sprayed fruit with sun damage.