

# Potential for hands-free Desuckering of Olive Trees



**13 September 2010**

**SUCKERS** shooting from rootstock can cause significant and costly losses in tree crops, including olives, tree fruits and nuts.

Suckers compete for nutrients and water, reducing potential fruit production; they harbour pests and diseases; and physically interfere with harvesting.

Mechanical harvesting of olives requires a particular tree shape – with a straight trunk for 1 to 1.2 metres from the ground. This section needs to be free from branches to allow the harvester to grip the trunk without obstruction, and to reduce damage to the tree.

There are currently no products registered for desuckering or removing water shoots in Australian olive groves, but this could change by the end of this year.

A submission is currently with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority for a registration change to allow a successful horticultural herbicide to also be used to chemically remove unwanted suckers in olive, nut and tree fruit crops.

Olive growers would already be familiar with Spotlight Plus® as a valuable 'spike' herbicide that enhances the control of a range of difficult-to-control broadleaf weeds in olive groves. It is a purpose-built carfentrazone herbicide for the horticulture market, with an inbuilt oil adjuvant to minimise drift and any potential damage to vines and tree crops.

Spotlight Plus is currently the only herbicide registered for chemical removal of suckers in grapevines, and its potential use could save Australian vineyards \$20 million annually. Savings to olive growers could also be considerable.

In many states of the USA, carfentrazone products are registered for control of suckers in grapevines, hops and a wide variety of tree crops including olives and stone fruit; the chemical does not move systemically through the plant, and does not result in residues in harvested fruit.

Trials were commissioned in Australia by Crop Care to determine the efficacy and crop safety of applying Spotlight Plus to suppress rootstock sucker growth in olives.

## Australian olive trials

In trials in a plantation of Manzanillo olives near Shepparton, Victoria over two summers (2007/08 and 2008/09), Spotlight Plus effectively halted the growth of suckers. By commencing application early in the season – before suckers reached 7 cm in length and hardened off – two applications successfully removed the original sucker load, plus the suckers that emerged after the first application. The trials concluded that the applications were safe to olive trees.

Apart from its usefulness for rapid and thorough desuckering of olive rootstock, Australian trials have also shown Spotlight Plus to be very successful at safely controlling suckers on plum tree rootstock.

Crop Care regulatory affairs manager Bronwyn Vorpapel said that registration of the new desuckering claims for tree fruit, including olives, was expected by December this year.

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Undesirable suckers sprouting from the base of an olive tree trunk.



Sucker growth in olives is successfully halted by spraying Spotlight Plus, resulting in rapid burndown of suckers. Early application is critical for effective sucker management.

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