

Protecting Apples From Sun Damage This Summer

2 March 2009

In this summer's extreme conditions, protecting fruit and trees from heat and moisture stress has become a practical consideration for all tree-fruit growers.

EE Muir & Son's horticultural agronomist Shane Coster: "This season has been unprecedented for the amount of fruit damaged, and the degree to which apples have been sunburnt.

"We typically have our first sunburn events in late November/ early December, but this season was different. With an unusually mild start to summer, fruit was not conditioned to extreme temperatures - so when the hot weather arrived, fruit was more susceptible than normal.

"Fruit that have fared the worst are Fuji, Granny Smith and Gala - outside hail-net; untreated with sunburn products; in rows running North-South; with low soil moisture; and with no live grasses in the inter-row.

"The new liquid sunscreen Parasol has helped to reduce the degree of sunburn, but not eliminated it this season. But feedback from orchardists about Parasol has again been positive - with respect to both its sunburn protection and its user-friendly characteristics.

"Some key points about Parasol are — it is a liquid therefore easy to use; there are no issues with removing Parasol residues in the packing line; there are no issues with shining the fruit; and there has been better packout with Parasol-treated fruit, both under net and outside net."

Shaun Heidrich, Crop Care, said that extensive trials were being carried out with Parasol this summer on a range of apple varieties, across several regions - including Shepparton, Victoria; Stanthorpe in southeast Queensland; and in southeast WA.

Aiming to maximise the yield and quality of marketable fruit, commercial growers such as Victorian orchardists Michael Ajani, Bonview, Officer and Geoffrey Thompson, Shepparton have also given apple trees the protection of Parasol this season.

Shaun Heidrich: "While detailed results of Parasol use in terms of fruit yield, quality, and return-on-investment won't be available until the 2008/09 apple crop is harvested, early results are promising.

"At the end of January, Parasol-treated apples in the Shepparton trial were showing a lot less sun damage than untreated apples.

"These photos - taken on January 16 after some very hot weather - show sunburnt, untreated Red Gala apples growing in an adjacent row to Parasol-protected apples that were exhibiting the variety's normal red colour, despite the hot conditions."

Why are growers considering Parasol?



They are very happy with the ease of use. The liquid formulation is quick and easy to mix, and can be applied in fewer passes than bulkier products – saving time and labour. As one grower said: "Just pour it in and away you go. We can cover 3-4 times the area in the same time, compared with other sunscreen products".



They are happy with the easy removal of any residue in the wash cycle of packing lines

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Granny Smith apples are particularly susceptible to sun damage, with grower estimates of up to 30% loss of their crops through solar damage. Yield improvements of 20% in the 2007/08 apple season have encouraged many Granny Smith growers to use Parasol again in the current season.



Shielding the apple tree canopy with a reflective coat of Parasol visibly reduces moisture stress – indicating more efficient water use, with water supporting fruit production rather than being lost through evaporation to cool the tree.

Mr Heidrich said results from the trials with Parasol for the 2008-09 apple season would be published after harvest and packout.



Golden Delicious apple trees and fruit at a Berwick orchard, Victoria looking healthy with the protection of Parasol liquid sunscreen in January 09.



Red Gala apples protected by Parasol sunscreen, showing normal red coloration in late January this year.



Sunburnt Red Gala apples without the protection of Parasol sunscreen, late January this year.

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