



FOCUS GROVE PROJECT

- Thanks to Bob Marshall for the following information

What is a Focus Grove/Farm

A focus grove or focus farm is an initiative to identify, trial and measure best practice in relation to improving outcomes of the grove/farm. The resulting information is then disseminated to growers so that they can all benefit and improve their productivity.

Focus farms have a long history in other land based activities in New Zealand. For example, Pipfruit NZ, Zespri, Beef + Lamb, etc

Why is Olives New Zealand Promoting a Focus Grove Project

Most olive growers are having difficulty in gaining the projected return on their investment. Currently there are approximately 300 olive groves in New Zealand covering 1000+ hectares, averaging a maximum crop of 4 tonnes/hectare.

International comparison is 10+tonnes/hectare.

Because of the low crop load, the cost for many growers to produce a litre of NZ EVOO is \$15 for just harvesting and processing. We must be able to do better to have viable businesses.

What is the Project Outline

The Focus Grove Project is to ascertain what specific olive grove practices will help growers achieve a position where groves can consistently average 10 tonnes of fruit per hectare. This will be a three year project so that effective measurement and review can be carried out.

The Project will involve six olive groves and a standard olive variety (Frantoio) in the main olive growing regions of New Zealand but the findings will benefit all growers and all varieties. An orchardist expert from Plant and Food Research will establish a baseline for the pilot groves and provide initial advice on spraying, fertilising, pruning and irrigation if required. Through regular follow-up visits by the expert, ongoing improvements will be made to the grove management regime with annual measurement of olive production. The project will formally run from August 2014 – August 2017, but actually started in 2013.

The status of the project will be communicated to members via the Olives NZ website, newsletter, Conferences and regional field days.

What will be Measured

The baseline for each olive grove block will be established by reviewing test data on soil and tree health, measuring canopies and establishing 2013 crop loads. Advice will then be provided on pruning, spraying, fertilising and irrigation, if required.

Each grove has two blocks of Frantoio set aside for the project. One block will be the control/usual practice block and the other will be the experimental block.

Some comparisons will be made between groves, but the major comparisons will be between the control and experimental blocks on a single grove.

The project will compare productivity of the control and experimental blocks and detail:

- Canopy sizes
- Pruning methods and frequency
- Fertiliser methods and amounts
- Irrigation methods and control
- Grove hygiene (grass and weed control) to maintain canopy health
- Spray regimes
- Overall crop load.

Who is Involved

The six focus groves are:

South Auckland – Simunovich

Hawke's Bay – Matapirio and Aquiferra

Wairarapa – Leafyridge

Nelson – Kakariki

Canterbury – Bel Hamed.

Funding

The participants have agreed to carry the operational costs of the project – labour, testing, sprays, irrigation, etc.

Mantissa has agreed to provide fertilisers for the project.

Olives New Zealand will provide project administration and financial administration.

An application is to be made to the Sustainable Farming Fund for the monitoring and review work to be carried out by Plant and Food Research. The estimated cost for the three year is approx \$145,000 and Olives New Zealand is expected to contribute 20%. Some of this latter cost must be met by regional contributions (Canterbury and Hawke's Bay have already committed \$1500 each). Approximately \$15,000 is required from regional contributions and/or sponsorship by other industry participants. The balance will then be met by Olives New Zealand