



FOCUS GROVE PROJECT

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 2,000+ hectares, averaging a maximum crop of 4 tonnes/hectare. Based on the 2014 harvest figures, 70% of groves are producing less than 10kg per tree, 22% are producing between 10 and 20kg per tree and only 8% are producing more than 20kg per tree. This situation has not improved in the three years that the Grove Census data has been recorded.

International comparison is 10+tonnes/hectare or 30kg+ per tree.

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 and for the future of the industry.

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 for regional information.

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

The following suppliers have agreed to supply expertise and in some cases product also:

Mantissa Corporation

Ravensdown

Grochem

Silex Tools

CB Norwoods.

Olives New Zealand will provide project administration and financial administration.

Applications have been made three times to the Sustainable Farming Fund and once to AGMARDT for the monitoring, review and reporting work to be carried out by Plant and Food Research and consultancy from Olive Culture and Harvesting. Olives New Zealand is expected to contribute a minimum of 20% of the total cash cost. Some of this latter cost will be met by regional contributions (Canterbury, Hawke’s Bay and Wairarapa have already contributed \$1500 each and Kapiti has contributed \$500). Olives New Zealand is seeking other regional contributions and/or sponsorship by other industry participants. The balance will then be met by Olives New Zealand.

Funding is calculated as follows.

Contributor	Cash	In Kind
Sustainable Farming Fund	93,200	
Olives NZ (Inc Branch contributions)	21,920	4,500*
Focus Groves		191,400
Suppliers		18,800
Others		4,880
Total Funding	\$109,120	\$219,580

*Represents nominal in kind contribution only

None of the funding applications to date have been successful, which means the Focus Grove Project is severely jeopardised.