

# Field days provide the missing link

**Hort Innovation**  
Strategic levy investment

**OLIVE FUND**

*The olive-levy funded project: 'An integrated pest and disease management extension program for the olive industry' (OLI7001) incorporates a national field day program, aimed at addressing the difficulties many small to medium growers face in managing pests and disease. Feedback from the first events is that there's much more value in the field days than just new information.*



The New South Wales round of integrated pest and disease management (IPDM) field days were a great success, providing valuable information on grove management techniques. Equally as important for many attendees, they also provided the opportunity to get together and discuss 'life in olives' with other growers.

### Learning, confirming and connecting

Peter O'Clery nurtures 2000 trees at Homeleigh Grove, 10km north of Canberra on the ACT/NSW border. He's been in the olive game since 1999, producing EVOO and about a tonne of table olives each year. He said the Marulan field day was about learning, confirming and connecting.

"We learned quite a lot about lace bug. We have what I'd say is a minor infestation of it but we want to hit it cleanly and we learned about that," he said.

"We learned that there was a time when you used to go in and hit all the trees in a grove but now you just hit the ones which are infected with something. We've got scale and were hitting it with everything but then decided that's not necessary, so that's the



Participants honed their identification skills out in the grove during the field days, including looking at the various stages of black scale.

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way we've always gone since, and it was good to have that confirmed.

"We found out where the research is going, and came away with practical knowledge that we'll use in dealing with lace bug. And again, one of the key points was getting confirmation that what we're doing in the grove is correct - along with things that you probably learned a good while ago but you weren't absolutely certain about. A lot of what we learned was when the trees were younger, and they weren't quite as important then as maybe they are today."

Also among O'Clery's highlights was "the broad catch up with others".

"Most of us put our oils in various shows and that provides one level of benchmarking. The other is how you're actually going compared with others in your region - are you travelling roughly on the same course and if not, why not?," he said.

"So in addition to research updates and hearing the IPDM experiences of other growers, one particular benefit of the field days is reconnecting with regional growers. With the demise of regional olive associations, the field days enable us all to re-establish links with other producers in our regions and catch up on where people are and what they are doing.

"There's also the opportunity to discuss issues pertaining to our specific region - who is who in the small world of processing and/or harvesting, what new support services are available locally, what new equipment we need/have experience with as our harvests have got bigger, etc.

"That's an important part of information sharing: along the way you learn the mistakes people have made and some of the successes that are worthwhile pursuing.

"I think field days are very important in terms of sharing information and knowledge. Otherwise, you read material and most of it sinks in but you don't have someone to discuss it with - and sometimes you skim it and don't go back to it. That kind of material came up at the field day and was discussed, which brings it further forward in your mind."

#### Problem solved

Avtar Singh runs Treetops Plantation in the NSW Riverina district. With 95,000 trees in production, the company is the largest table olive producer in Australia and also produces EVOO. He's been working with olives since 2008 and found the answer to a previously baffling problem at the Marulan field day.

"Last year we had some soft nose problems and I learned that it's to do with irrigation," he said.

"I talked to the guys and they gave us some ideas for new methods of irrigation which will be more efficient and stop the soft nose.

"I also learned that table olives are even



Mike Thomsett's demonstration on the use of drones for grove monitoring was part of the AOA's extended field day program.

more sensitive to management practices, and that you need to do things a little bit different depending on the weather and the temperature, etc. We do look at that but we need to take the conditions into consideration even more and maybe change some things."

Singh said that while soft nose is the only significant problem they have in the grove, the opportunity to discuss it in detail was invaluable.

"It's a very specific problem and it was important to have that one-on-one opportunity to speak with people about it," he said.

"We're now going to take the ideas they gave us back and trial three different

methods in the grove, and see which works best."

#### Knowledge = confidence

Alan Smith has a grove of 450 trees at Quorrobolong, near Cessnock in NSW's Lower Hunter region, and therefore has "quite a bit of disease pressure". Anthracnose is a particular issue due to the humidity.

The grove was originally planted in the mid-1990s to both table olive and oil varieties, however Anthracnose got the better of the Manzanilla and it was subsequently replanted with Coratina. So Smith now only produces oil, along with

#### The program

Value-adding growers' travel to the field days, the AOA has included an additional range of topics to the integral IPDM project information, creating a full and comprehensive day of learning and networking. Sessions include:

- Risk management and Biosecurity
- Grove management checklist: Irrigation; Nutrition and soil health; Pruning/tree management
- Product quality improvement; OliveCare best practice
- Tastebook™ sensory training program
- Market development: Everyday campaign; Industry generic promotions programs
- IPDM plenary session: Principles and practices of IPDM; Monitoring for pests, diseases and beneficial species; Biology and life cycles of key pests and diseases; Factors influencing pest and disease spread and incidence in groves; Strategies for conventional and organic management - advantages and disadvantages; Importance of timing, application and targeting of interventions.
- IPM field activities: Grove walk and discussion; Insect and disease identification; Grove management.

Q & A sessions throughout the day provide for group discussions on both the topics covered and any other aspects of pest and disease management, while the informal post-event networking dinner provides an opportunity for participants to get one-on-one with the experts to discuss issues of relevance to their own groves and businesses.



The IPDM field days saw “growers in one grove having a good chat” - an infrequent opportunity much appreciated by the attendees.

olives for home consumption from the grove’s one Kalamata tree.

A scientist by trade, with 16 years of experience in the grove, he said he gained a lot from the field day.

“I learned the ins and outs of olive lace bug and black scale in great detail. We generally deal with it without a lot of science about it: this linked the practical with a bit of theory to give us a more structured way of managing pests and diseases,” he said.

“Black scale and olive lace bug are pressing issues in this valley, so those discussions were really valuable.

“And on the practical side, particularly with black scale, it was getting out the little magnifying glass and looking at the various stages of the black scale - and then understanding that you spray the surrounding trees and not the ones showing very obvious signs of attack, because it’s already moved on from those ones to the next trees. So you go out in layers because if you don’t you have it pop up in the next row.”

Overall, Smith said, he came away feeling better equipped to monitor his grove and act appropriately on issues.

“The most useful thing is, when you walk into a grove, having the confidence to assess exactly what’s going on – whether it’s black scale or lace bug,” he said.

“Knowing that bit of science behind it gives you the ability to identify what the issue is with confidence, and another layer of knowledge about how to approach the issue.”

**More, please**

So would our growers attend other field days in the future?

O’Clery: “When possible, yes. Ours is a fairly lonely existence, isn’t it: you meet other growers at markets etc but that’s not a place where

**Continuing IPDM Field Day Schedule**

Qld	3 November – Toowoomba
VIC	16 November – Geelong area
	18 November – Wangaratta/Shepparton
SA	24 November – McLaren Vale
TAS	1 December – Launceston – Glendale Olives, White Hill
WA	15 February 2019 – Gin Gin
	17 February 2019 – Margaret River

you discuss your problems – and to some extent there’s an element of competition in that commercial setting. The field days allow those important discussions to happen.

“The organisers need to be commended for running these events. It was a good team and I think they did an incredibly good job. I hope this sort of thing becomes a pretty regular occurrence.”

Singh: “I think field days are a better way of sharing information. You talk to each other and everyone shares the knowledge they have about a situation.

“I always want to talk to other guys – I’d go in the future.”

Smith: “I’m a fan of field days. The Hunter Olive Association has had a number over the years and from my observation, having the growers in one grove having a good chat brings out things they might be a bit reluctant to talk about. You can be talking about one thing and it’ll bring out all sorts of issues from other groves.

“I think they’re terrific and I’d definitely attend others.”

More information and registrations: [www.olivebiz.com.au](http://www.olivebiz.com.au)

# Interest in IPDM proves strong at NSW field days

Olive growers from around the southern states of Australia have cemented their interest in integrated pest and disease management (IPDM) at sessions held last month as part of recent field days in New South Wales.

The first, hosted at 'Daisy Bank Grove' at Big Hill near Marulan, drew an impressive crowd of 41 growers. Another was held at Adina Vineyard and Olive Grove at Lovedale and attracted nearly 28 IPDM enthusiasts.

Attendees travelled from as far as South Australia and Victoria to attend the regional New South Wales events.

The workshops were held as part of Hort Innovation Olive Fund project, *An integrated pest and disease management extension program for the olive industry (OL17001)*.

Lead researchers Dr Robert Spooner-Hart from Western Sydney University and Dr Len Tesoriero led the plenary sessions, followed by grove walks and Q&A sessions.

Dr Spooner-Hart said those who attended were a mix of growers who are already actively engaged with IPDM and others who were interested in finding out more about new management practices.

"It was incredibly exciting to have such a large variety of conventional and organic growers in the shed, all interested in the principles and practices of IPDM," Dr Spooner-Hart said.

"Based on that, we covered strategies for conventional and organic management, as well as the different advantages and disadvantages of certain management strategies.

"We also presented on the theory around monitoring for pests, diseases and beneficial species,



Dr Robert Spooner-Hart in the grove at Lovedale

as well as the biology and life cycles of key pests and diseases and the factors influencing pest and disease spread and incidence in groves.

"The importance of timing, application and targeting of interventions was a topic that created great engagement with the attendees also, specifically around how to best time applications. The current status of number one biosecurity pest, Xylella (that causes Olive Quick Decline) was also discussed."

Dr Spooner-Hart said the grove walk that followed the plenary session offered a highlight of the field day, including a demonstration showing how drones can be used to monitor diseases and pests in olive groves, and assist with overall grove management.

"All attendees – myself included – found this of tremendous interest," he said.

"The demonstration offered an insight into how drones can obtain

images that can show exactly what is going on in the grove, and we were then able to use the images taken on the day to further discuss IPDM options based on those drone photos.”

As part of the project, a survey was completed in June 2018 to help the research team identify current IPDM knowledge and needs, and the results were shared at the workshop.

“One of the key questions in the survey was asking olive growers what they believed to be the key pests and diseases of note,” Dr Spooner-Hart said.

“We learned via the survey that black scale, olive lace bug and anthracnose were all identified as the top three pest and disease issues for those who responded, and these are the same three major pests and diseases that our project is focusing on.

“It’s great to know that we are directly addressing key concerns of industry and providing the resources to deal with them.

“We will conduct another survey in the final year of the research project to ask growers how much more adept at IPDM techniques they feel they are, and how their management style may have changed.”



Field day attendees at Marulan

The IPDM workshops at Marulan and Lovedale formed part of the broader Australian Olive Association field days, which included sessions on biosecurity, risk management, irrigation, nutrition and soil health, tree management, product quality improvement and market development.

AOA CEO Greg Seymour said the attendee numbers were incredibly pleasing.

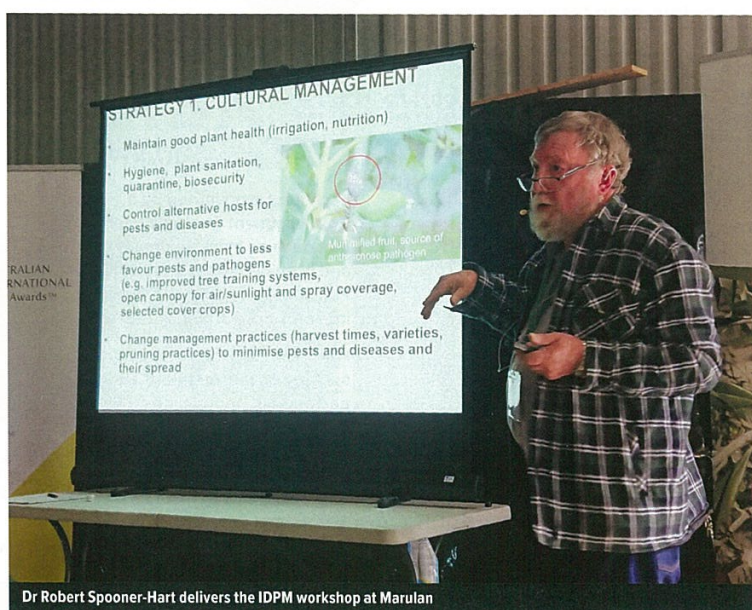
“It was a credit to industry and their commitment to ensuring

best practice in the groves,” Mr Seymour said.

“Each session offered growers new and interesting information, and each topic had relevance to each other, allowing them to go home with a new and inspired toolkit of information to try in their own groves, which is what these field days are all about.”

Dr Robert Spooner-Hart agreed.

“As IPDM specialists, it’s one thing for us to talk about the importance of tree health, but to have biosecurity and other grove management experts also presenting on the day made it an excellent exchange of information for growers,” he said.



Dr Robert Spooner-Hart delivers the IPDM workshop at Marulan



### Research Recap

**PROJECT NAME:** *An integrated pest and disease management extension program for the olive industry (OL17001)*

**PROJECT AIM:** To provide Australian olive growers access to current, practical information and instruction for implementing integrated pest and disease management (IPDM) strategies in the grove.

**RESEARCH PARTNER:** Western Sydney University

**FUNDING:** Hort Innovation Olive Fund

**PROJECT STATUS:** Ongoing