

Suggestions for risk mitigation and to build resilience in a challenging season

It's important to consider all aspects of orchard operations where the season may be challenging or where there is risk of shortages in key inputs such as labour, freight or the possibility of adverse events such as climatic or world wide disruptions.

Put aside some time to **work on the business** not just **work in the business**, review your situation in terms of minimising risk and managing efficiencies on and off orchard to maximise profitability.

Finances:

- Review cash flow vs debt ratio.
- Ask the tough questions of your business model.
- Have the tough conversations with your professional advisers, earlier rather than later, and seek independent advice where possible.
 - Does it stack up?
 - Should I get out now?

People:

- Acknowledge that people are a legitimate input into your business just as sun, water and chemicals are.
- Remember it's now a competitive environment, find your unique selling proposition and communicate well with your potential employees.
- What's my recruitment and retention plan for "new" seasonal staff?
 - Can I be more flexible on rosters? By being more flexible I could attract wider groups such as those wanting only school hours or after school/evening shifts.
 - Can I hire more staff to allow for staff time off to assist with attraction and retention of staff?
 - Use technology to find staff (digital media) and then keep in touch with them until you can offer a contract or want them to start.
 - Make contact with your previous workers during the off season and invite them back for the coming season.
 - Do I offer accommodation, travel, wifi, bonuses etc?
 - Can I work with other growers to share these resources? Collaborate on transport or accommodation options.
- What agency support is available for recruitment?
- Don't forget your long term supervisors. What training and support can I offer for them to help with the challenges of pastoral care and the supervisory skills now needed?
- What machinery, changes in processes or training could assist "new" workers maximise their capacity and quicker?
- Can I collaborate with other growers within sector/region or from other industries to share staff or machinery?

Operational considerations:

Review your approach to key on orchard activities for the coming season and beyond.

What varieties or blocks should I cut out or not utilise this coming season?

- not profitable – low returns, aging trees vs higher input costs to maintain

- market demand has decreased, competing varieties in market at same time or just not returning the same value in market

1. Pruning

- How should I go about this?
For example make less cuts but take more wood out, less fruiting sites requires less thinning.
- How can I control vigour so there is less pruning next year?

2. Thinning

- Flower thinning consider all your options/tools/techniques.
 - chemical vs machine vs by hand or a combination
- Fruit thinning
 - Look at your systems and review your process.
 - Consider the costs of doing it yourself or using a contractor at an hourly rate.

3. Picking

- Review your process
- How many picks?
- What containers are you picking into?
- Can it be semi-automated?

4. Packing

- Review the process, what value do I get by packing?
- Is it taking too much of my time?
- What's the true cost in planning and staff vs the cost of outsourcing it?
- Can it be further automated?
- What machinery or training can assist "new" workers?
- Can I use the packhouse labour in the orchard?

5. Longer term - production systems

- 2 d vs 3 d plantings
- Rain covers or not?
- Agchem use pre and post weather events to mitigate damage.
- On orchard and post-harvest (packaging, storage) techniques/tools to maximise shelf life.

Where to go for information and help?

You'll find if you have a problem people generally want to help. A problem shared is a problem halved and planning for the what if's is good.

- Talk to fellow growers, some ideas or options may need collaboration with others to be successful and financially viable.
- Use Google or Youtube for ideas, remember it's how you ask the question.
- Seek out others such as rural support networks and rural service providers to talk to.
- Talk to government and regional agencies such as MSD, regional councils, training providers (Primary ITO).