

International nursery group meets in Australia

Report by John Fitzsimmons

Australia recently hosted representatives from the Associated International Group of Nurseries' (AIGN) 11 member territories for its 2011 Annual General Meeting. During their visit the AIGN delegates visited growers, packhouses and breeding programs on a program coordinated by the group's Australian member ANFIC (Australian Nurserymen's Fruit Improvement Company).

AIGN® is a worldwide organisation which "blends the diverse talents of a number of progressive nurserymen" in the major growing areas of the world. Currently the group has members in Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, the European Union (based in Belgium and France), New Zealand, North America, South Africa and Uruguay. Since the meetings in Australia, AIGN has added a new member to the group, NZ Orchard, a fruit variety introduction and commercialisation company based in South Korea. Included in its activities is being an exclusive agent for Turners and Growers Group and ENZA NZ.

Both ANFIC and AIGN share very similar beginnings, where a group of like minded nurserymen formed an alliance to share information about fruit tree propagation which then expanded into the importation of new fruit varieties, the protection of that Intellectual Property and then the Australian and global development of variety management.

During the recent visit, AIGN members enjoyed professional and technical interaction which has led to information flow about new rootstocks and fruit varieties between members, and discussions on the commercial development of new fruit varieties which are consumer friendly and healthy. Discussions also revealed other grower benefits like reduced costs of production.

AIGN is actively involved in managing the introduction of new Australian fruit varieties where ANFIC holds the global rights. Members stopped off in New Zealand on the way to Australia to visit Prevar and the NZ Plant & Food Research pome fruit breeding program where AIGN holds exclusive global propagation rights to new varieties. APAL is a major shareholder of the Prevar Company.

Lynnell Brandt, AIGN President from Washington state, USA, was asked whether growers have

to modify their expectations or whether nurseries have to lift their game. "I think it's a combination of these," he said. "AIGN is looking to use its network and its own database systems (Hertha™, which AIGN has developed and owns) to try to advance the amount of evaluations and testing around the world – to co-ordinate that, but also to use the north and south areas in (alternate) off-seasons to look at products as soon as possible and then be in a position to make those recommendations."

He went on, "Our members individually and collectively face competition from other groups and individuals. We've found that, collectively, we can make a better representation to breeding programs – be they federal, state, university or private – by representing their products around the world simultaneously, and protecting their product through the development of Intellectual Property (IP) for the new cultivars."



Visiting AIGN group members discuss grading and packing of the Victorian pear harvest at Plunkett's packshed.

ANFIC's Gavin Porter commented, "The reality is hitting home pretty much around the world that there's not going to be another Pink Lady™. But what I think growers are beginning to hold onto now is that, having access to some of the new varieties – and the excitement attached to them, also opens doors that can get them into new markets. It may just open the door – to say that we've got this marvellous new product that may only account for a certain percentage of their production – but the rest of their commodity-style products can still be sold."

"Simply, they are looking for value adding and incremental difference just to give them market access"

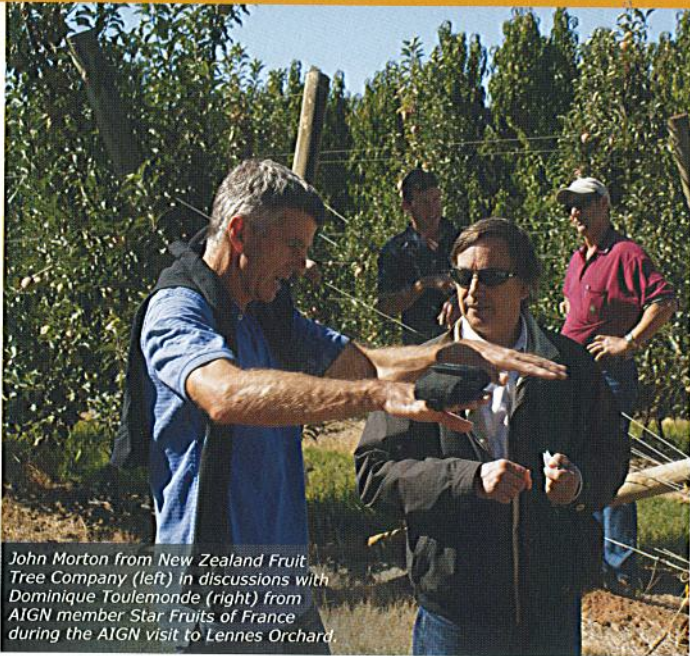
Mr Brandt added, "The challenges are the same for all of the markets around the world. We very much live in a global market and in order to remain competitive – both at home and abroad – we need to have the full range of new products available to our industries to adequately compete. What ANFIC and AIGN can do is to make sure those products are vetted and available to the respective industries."

Mr Brandt said that, while AIGN members were in Australia, many of their conversations centered on commercialisation models and "how best to present new material in a coordinated fashion".

"All of us everywhere are working to keep up with the retail demands, the changing retail system, and what commercial models are, in fact, the most appropriate and applicable."

"(IP) management and genetics are both equally important. We need the genetics to continue to present a better product for the consumer. But we also need to develop the methodology through production, through packaging, through marketing, through the systems with the big retailers, to make those new genetic products have the best chance possible to be recognised."

"Worldwide (growers') margins are getting smaller, people are working toward economies of scale – getting larger to be able to maintain their position, and there's more pressure on smaller entities to be able to compete."



John Morton from New Zealand Fruit Tree Company (left) in discussions with Dominique Toulemonde (right) from AIGN member Star Fruits of France during the AIGN visit to Lennes Orchard.



The AIGN group inspected current production methods at Lenne's Orchard, Ardmona, in the Goulburn Valley.

► In summary Mr Brandt observed, "Tomorrow the young, smart, agile people will still be there but there will be a continuing fallout at the other end of the (grower) population."

AIGN has proven helpful in respect to the problems which can be created by local politics and the ever-changing laws that relate to plant materials. AIGN members also enjoyed several visits with members of the fruit industry in Victoria and Tasmania which also included a gathering together of the ANFIC nursery members. As pointed out by Lynnell Brandt, the meetings in Victoria and Tasmania were quite representative of the entire week of AIGN sessions and opportunities to observe the fruit industries in these regions.

"Here we had the chance to have lengthy conversations with tree fruit nursery people from the area and what a great experience it was," Brandt says. "It was really apparent what a small world it is as we all really share the same challenges along with the same opportunities."

AIGN was designed as a marketing entity that works not only to assist its membership but to further enhance the worldwide availability of tree fruit varieties and related information. It acts in this capacity to serve the world tree fruit industry by helping to coordinate the availability of these varieties and products, and by providing the information and technical assistance necessary to help in the marketing of these varieties. Its primary role is that of a co-operator working with the world's fruit industry.

This organization was put together in order to develop beneficial avenues of information flow with regard to new rootstocks and varieties.

In addition the primary objective was to aid in the introduction and distribution of varieties and rootstocks to respective industries throughout the world. It permits members the opportunity to test and evaluate promising varieties and rootstocks and thereby allows them to remain competitive in the world market. ■

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