



Continuing the Fleming Family Tradition

The Evaluation Facts

Volume 1, 2013-2014

Welcome to the first edition of The Evaluation Facts for the 2013 - 2014 season. The Evaluation Facts is a regular newsletter keeping you in touch with the latest information from the Graham's Factree Cultivar Evaluation Project.

The Story So Far

It has very recently been brought to my attention that there is a percentage of our customers and a number of other commercial growers who are not aware of our Evaluation Project, or who are not aware of the purpose of the Project, with others even having a totally incorrect or misinformed perception relative to the Project. Hence, the purpose of this first newsletter for the 2013-2014 season, will be to fill in all the gaps and to correct any misconceptions for the Project. I'll try and cover all: the Who; the What; the Why; the Where; and the How.

'What' is the Evaluation Project?

The Evaluation Project (this is what we call it) has been funded by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) using voluntary contributions from our nursery, Graham's Factree Pty Ltd, and matched funds from the Australian Government. It is a 4 year project with the primary task of evaluating stone fruit and cherries which Graham's Factree (and formerly Fleming's Nurseries), have imported over the years and reviewing new potential varieties to import. We have evaluation sites in most of the major fruit growing districts of Australia made possible with the assistance of individual growers, local fruit growing associations and other interested parties. We wanted the Project to have the involvement of not just those immediately involved, but all Australian growers, so a major part of the Project is to keep all Australian growers informed of the progress via our regular newsletters and an annual report.

'Why' a HAL funded Project?

Over a number of years we have been committed to the importation of a substantial number of new selections for the industry. However, up until now we have struggled with attempting to undertake proper evaluation of many of these new selections due to the sheer magnitude of the task at hand.

On separating from Fleming's Nursery, we did an audit of the number of selections that we had imported over the years, looking at those that had been thoroughly evaluated, and discovered that there were upward of a thousand selections that had not been appropriately evaluated.

We wanted to change this so that growers in Australia have access to the most promising varieties.

When we reviewed a program that would allow us to evaluate the many selections available in all of the major growing districts it was clearly evident that the nursery did not have the resources to undertake this substantial task alone. So the Evaluation Project was born.

With matching funds through HAL, we have been able to enlist the help of some very committed growers who were willing to commit considerable time and resources to the Project, in return for a small amount of funding which doesn't come close to covering their costs involved.

'How' does the Project work?

With up to a thousand selections it was decided that this was way too many to plant into each evaluation site. So we came up with the principle of having a Primary site where all of the selections would be sent initially, with those that were considered to have commercial potential then sent to Secondary sites. There is one Primary site for stone fruit and one for Cherries. From those selections that passed the Primary Evaluation, the Secondary Evaluation sites would be given the opportunity to select those selections that were considered suitable for that area. For example, the



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low chill site would only take the low chill selections, or late season sites would only take selections that matured in the later season. In consultation with the evaluators, we designed two evaluation forms consisting of a Primary Form that gave only a pass or a fail for many of the commercially important attributes of the type of fruit. The Secondary Form then went into more detail about each attribute. During the initial years of the Project, we published the results of both of these evaluations in the regular newsletter as well as the annual report, however due to the number of evaluations coming through now, only the secondary evaluations are being published. Taking into account the volume of these evaluations being processed, consideration is being given at this point of publishing only a summary of each evaluation, with the full details being available on the website.

'Where' are the Evaluation Sites?

The Primary site for stone fruit is located in the Riverland district of South Australia. This location was chosen for two reasons. Firstly it suited selections with the range of chilling requirements. The second reason, and probably the most important, being the passion and commitment of the grower involved to provide quality, and more importantly, honest evaluations of the selections. The Secondary sites are located in: the Perth Hills, Swan Hill and Shepparton. The low chill site was originally planted in the Lismore area for low chill selections but this site has now unfortunately been removed.

The cherry Primary site is located just out of Wangaratta with the grower involved having equal commitment to the task at hand. The Secondary sites are located in the Adelaide Hills, Young and Silvan. We are presently endeavoring to establish a Secondary site in Tasmania.

'Who' are the Evaluators?

The Evaluators are a team of committed fruit growers who have a real passion for the job they do. Many of them are already known throughout the industry, but we don't want to publicise who they are as their task is hard enough without the possible inundation of questions from curious growers.



(These photos were taken at the evaluator training day that we held in Renmark last season. The intention was to make sure that the evaluators were 'calibrated' in an attempt to ensure consistent scoring across the various evaluation sites.)



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What else is there to know?

Can a grower order something that hasn't yet been evaluated? Nothing has changed in this regard. If you have seen it overseas and you have decided that you want to plant it, you are quite welcome to plant it, whether that be a couple of trial trees or in a large commercial planting. Whilst we have always sought to encourage growers to evaluate new varieties, ultimately it is the grower's decision as to what they wish to plant and when to plant it.

Are the evaluators getting a commercial advantage? They probably are to some degree as they are seeing the selections in their own conditions, but once they do an evaluation it is out there for everyone to see. The evaluators that we have are certainly undertaking the huge task with the best interest of the industry in mind and it is our opinion that their efforts undertaken for the Project outweigh any perceived commercial advantage.

How do growers get the newsletter? We email the newsletters to our total grower list who have provided an email address, so if you don't get the newsletters currently, give us a ring and let us know what your current email address and will add you to the circulation list. We are intending to put all past and future newsletters on the web site that is dedicated to the Evaluation Project, however until they are all uploaded you can find all the individual evaluations at <http://evaluations.factree.com.au>.

How do growers get the Annual Report? A limited number of Annual Reports are published each year due to the cost involved. They are sent to our breeders and other industry people, with a small number going out to growers. The report is available to be viewed or downloaded on the above web site.

What do the scores given to each selection mean?

You will notice in the 2010-2011 annual report that there were quite a number of selections given a score of 9/10. At our end of the year review in 2011 we decided that this didn't give the evaluators much room to play with in the scoring for even better selections. The decision was made that future scores would be 'moved down' and recalibrated a notch or two to allow for those 'exceptional' varieties.

The basic description of the scores that was published in the previous two annual reports are:

5/10 = poor variety and should be discarded

6/10 = variety displays some negative attributes but needs further consideration

7/10 = variety is equal to the current commercial variety available to growers

8/10 and above = variety is very good and should be further evaluated by individual growers to see if it meets their needs.

In our current review of the last season we are looking at these above descriptions of the scores and have come to the conclusion that these descriptions need a slight 'tweak'.

For example, if a variety scored a 7/10 and it is considered to be equal to currently commercial varieties, then why shouldn't that variety also be highlighted as a variety worthy of consideration for a grower to see if it suits them!

Alternatively, if we consider a selection that gets a score of 8/10, this is considered but the evaluator to be better than what's currently commercially available. Should we have a bit more confidence to say that it's now ready to be commercialised! This is where the difficult decision comes in. At this point in time we have only seen Secondary evaluations from our Primary site. Should commercialisation decisions be based on just this one evaluation? We are currently being conservatively hesitant to say that we should wait for feedback from other districts before we are confident enough to start recommending that growers should consider planting them.

In the last few days I have sat down with our Primary evaluator and decided to make a change to the description of the scores that have been given to better reflect the true value of the varieties currently being evaluated. The current wording we are considering will be something like:

< 5/10 = poor variety and should not be seriously considered

5/10 = variety displays some negative attributes but needs further consideration



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6/10 = variety is equal to the current commercial varieties available to growers and should be trialled by individual growers to see if it works for them.

6.5/10 = variety is showing that it is superior to current commercial varieties and should be seriously considered for commercial planting.

7/10 and above = variety is very good and is highly recommended for growers to consider planting commercially.

(The 'but, 'but', 'but' to this is that at this stage we are only seeing evaluations from Renmark and would prefer to wait until seen in all districts before we can be 100% confident in a new variety)

The other side to this that we need to remember is that the Primary site is in Renmark which has a hotter climate and less chill than many other regions. So, should we write off a selection that may have potential in other regions just because it doesn't work in Renmark? This is an aspect that I'm still not sure about and will be considering further.

How do we decide what to import?

A major part of the Project is that we have someone attend 10 fruit shows at Zaiger Genetics each season to review their current selections. The people that we ask to attend these shows are a part of the Evaluation Project, whether grower evaluators, members of the local fruit growers group or staff from Graham's Factree. It is their job to return to us a report of the selections they have seen and a rating for each of the selections, including recommendations as to which selections we should consider to import. As the number of selections that we can afford to import is limited, we try to rank all of the recommended selections and the final decision is made using these recommendations.

One of our evaluators riding in one of Zaiger's vehicles collecting samples of fruit to be evaluated later. The paper bags are full of fruit. At any one fruit show, more than 50 selections can be viewed on any one day.



When visiting Zaigers, our evaluators are provided with a 'Quick' evaluation form on which to take field notes to be used when providing their report.

I hope that you have found this newsletter informative and that I have at least answered some of the questions that you may have had, or clarified some issues relative to the Project in the process.

If you have more questions? Pick up the phone and call me, or send me an email to graham@factree.com.au and I'll be happy to answer any question you might have.

Graham Fleming