



News



& views

SUMMER
2025

W elcome to Summer!

We finished packing at the Glasshouse shed on 24th October. This represented an extended packing season, some weeks longer than normal. All in all a very successful year for the packhouse from many perspectives.

We were able to record some major performance improvements that will have flow-on effects on productivity and financial benefit.



**Update
from
Roger Turner
General Manager**

Such savings will impact future cost recoveries and hence the potential for stabilizing packing charges.

Our biggest cost in the packhouse, as readers will understand, is labour.

Efforts to reduce this overhead through productivity gains will flow on to reduce our overall packing costs.

Apart from productivity improvements a high volume season also contributes towards lower unit costs. This was particularly the case in 2025 as growers were experiencing a good season both yield-wise and with favourable weather conditions.

Offsetting some of our productivity gains were mechanical issues with our equipment and the downtime some failures caused.

This is not unexpected with aging machinery but nonetheless comes at a cost in terms of loss of productivity and repair expenses.

This decline in the serviceability of all packhouse equipment has prompted a re-think on the need to upgrade to more modern technology, and at the same time undertake capital works on ancillary equipment that is also aging.

This has led to the Board deciding to invest in a new grader, which is now about to be installed in readiness for the '26 packing season. More about this acquisition in the newsletter.

Still in the packhouse, we will shortly be preparing for the lychee season, assembling sorting equipment, undertaking preventive maintenance on the coolrooms and recruiting labour.

During the course of the '25 season we reviewed our relationship with market agents with the aim of increasing competitiveness for our growers' fruit. This has resulted in some new faces on our books freeing up options for maximising grower returns.

All in all, from an operations perspective we can look back on 2025 as a successful year highlighted by improved cost-efficiencies and the resolve to invest in the future.

Grower returns remained under pressure for much of the season though we are still confident that our new market agent strategy has advantaged our growers and will continue to do so into the future.

May I wish all of you and your families the very best for the Christmas period and I look forward to doing business with you into the future.

Working for each other..

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Message from the Chairman



Matthew Gray
Chairman

Hi Readers,

As the new Chairman of Natures Fruit Company I'm delighted to present my introductory 'Chairman's Message'.

It's an exciting time to step into this role. With over 25 years of experience in farming and agriculture, I've seen firsthand how innovation continues to shape our industry and I'm looking forward to the challenges ahead for both the industry and NFC alike.

I'd like to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt thanks to Mr John Tannock for his many years of dedicated leadership and service. John's steady vision and commitment have guided our company through significant change in the industry and we wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

The horticulture sector is evolving rapidly, and Natures is well-positioned to accommodate and confront change head-on.

A highlight of this new chapter for our company is the introduction of our state-of-the-art vision grader. This technology will dramatically improve our efficiency and enhance quality control, thus strengthening our competitive advantage and delivering even better outcomes for our growers and customers alike.

I look forward to working closely with our board, management and business partners as we continue to expand Natures Fruit Company and build on our solid reputation as a leader in fruit packing and marketing.

The future is bright, and together, we'll make the most of the opportunities ahead.

In conclusion, on behalf of the team at Natures, may I wish you and your families a safe, joyful Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Warm regards

Matthew Gray
Chairman

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Future proofing our business

In a meaningful demonstration of faith in the future, the Board of Natures Fruit Company has decided to invest in the latest hi-tech grading capability for its Glasshouse Mountains packing facility.

Justifying the acquisition, the Board is convinced the technology will secure productivity gains resulting in lower packing costs and deliver consistent grading standards.



As the world continues to embrace technology and adopt hi-tech solutions for all manner of tasks, the horticultural industry has not been spared its share of scientific and technological innovation.

Robotic fruit picking, while still in its infancy, is not that far away. But one technical advance that has reached a degree of maturity in our industry is the high speed intelligent sorting of fruit in our packhouses.

Essentially we are talking about high definition and resolution technology used to examine an avocado on the packing line, and an advanced electronic weighing system enabling precise sorting based on weight, size, colour, and shape.

The adoption of these technologies not only improves grading efficiencies but provides for quality consistency and reliability. This can only be a win for the industry and ultimately the grower.

Using HD rapid photography cameras and advanced image processing technology, the vision inspection system can scan the surface

of a piece of fruit in a fraction of a second, accurately identifying any slight imperfections.

In July your Board decided to replace the existing grader in the Glasshouse packhouse with a Reemoon RM200 vision grader.

The installation is now in progress and we expect to commission the new technology for the startup of the '26 avocado season.

Further, '*smart sorting*' is becoming the new engine ... custom grading to meet individual client specifications, by simply adjusting the high definition visual scanner to match a client spec in terms of allowable shape tolerances, cosmetic imperfections, etc. This will empower our marketing to carve out new niche markets.

Natures' General Manager, Roger Turner enthusiastically supported the acquisition of the new grader and cited the new direction as a major commitment by the company.

"This investment will help to lower costs due to increased operational efficiencies, and ensure customer satisfaction through quality consistency", Roger commented.

Reflecting on 2025

2025 has been a year of mixed comings and goings for growers.

An 'on-season' for avocado yields and average returns but then a busy season for our packhouse. Another year plagued by ongoing cost increases both on farm and here at NFC.

2026 presents a new chapter for the Glasshouse packhouse as we commission our just-acquired vision grader and push new productivity boundaries. This will introduce some challenges as we seek to contain packing costs.



Merry Christmas

Wishing all our readers the very best for the Season, from the Directors, Management and Staff at Natures.

John Tannock reflects on his time as Chairman at Natures Fruit Company



Looking forward ... looking back after 13 years

As most of you will be aware, I recently made the decision to stand down from my role as Chairman of *Natures Fruit Company*. In some ways it was an easy decisionand in some ways it wasn't. On the one hand I have enjoyed the role and felt I could continue on forever – well for a few more years anyway. On the other hand, I had to consider what was in the best interest of NFC. In the end it was an easy decision.

By standing down and continuing to serve on the Board, I was able to offer a younger director the opportunity to grow into the role and be around to provide any support that may be required. I therefore came to the view that NFC's best interests were served if there was a seamless transition sooner rather than later.

In 2006, I received an invitation to join the Board following the resignation of Nola Stumm. My initial reaction was to decline. I had spent the previous three decades of my working life attending council meetings and committee meetings and I was not overly excited at prospect of spending the next few years of my life in more meetings.

After giving the matter further consideration, I agreed to accept the invitation.

My change of heart came about because I could see value in having some oversight as to what happened to my fruit as it passed further up the supply chain.

I well remember my first Board meeting.

What impressed me was the culture of mutual respect that was shown by directors and management. Instead of a confrontational attitude when others had a different opinion, the focus was on arriving at the best possible decision for the benefit of the business and our grower members

The directors at that time were George Green, Rod Kippen, Col Cumming (and myself).

The Chairman was Ros Smerdon who, although only relatively young, had the respect and admiration of all directors.

I understand that we directors were referred to as Ros's 'Grumpy Old Men'.

One of the areas that has been a challenge for me in my time on the Board and particularly as Chairman, is the somewhat dubious ethics of some within the horticultural industry. This was a bit of a culture shock for me.

My primary career has been in the engineering profession where there are strict standards of behaviour and severe penalties for unethical behaviour.

Business is won on performance rather than 'bad-mouthing' competitors. In that regard, I have found NFC's integrity and transparency a good fit for the values that I believe in.

In conclusion, I wish my successor Matt Gray all the best.

In the few months that Matt has been in the chair, he has demonstrated both enthusiasm and ability. His performance has confirmed in my mind that my decision to stand down after 13 years in the role, was the correct one.

I look forward to continuing as a Director and contributing towards the future success of this great company.

Promotional campaign timed to partner new grading capability

A fresh new print advertisement and communications program promoting the advantages of doing business with Natures Fruit was unveiled recently, appearing in print media from October.

The launch was timed to coincide with other promotional executions publicising the advance in processing capability at the company's Glasshouse Mountains packhouse.

A key element of the campaign is the new vision technology grader for commissioning at the start of the '26 avo season.

The "peace of mind" message in the advertisement clearly articulates the suite of benefits growers gain 'doing business' with Natures Fruit Company.

The Natures' package is unquestionably convincing and it is hoped the campaign will attract new grower members.

From the commencement of the '26 season Natures' growers and customers alike will directly benefit with the acquisition of the new Reemoon grader and its hi-tech features.

First and foremost is the precision of the vision technology. This feature ensures grade accuracy and consistency providing our customers that assurance fruit is true to a standard. It also allows our growers to have confidence and peace of mind that their fruit is being sorted with a high level of correctness.

Secondly, and importantly, the grading speed of the Reemoon equipment has a huge impact on packhouse productivity. This feature will have the effect of lowering packhouse labour costs and helping to maintain competitive packing fees.

All helping to future proof the business at Natures.

WHAT DOES PEACE OF MIND MEAN?

Confidence knowing your fruit is in trusted hands.

At Natures Fruit Company, we are both your packer and your marketing partner. We value integrity and transparency when handling your fruit, accountable for your returns and keeping you informed every step of the way.

Considering changing your packer? This is what you can expect from us:

- **Competitive returns.** We access all markets for the best price.
- **Immediate transparency.** Packout data in hand within 48 hours.
- **Reliable payments.** In your bank within four weeks of packout.

Grower benefits secured by 35+ years' experience.

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Peace of mind is not just a promise.

WE PROVE IT

Talk to us about your next season.



Will our fruit be robust enough to grow our export & domestic markets?

When we look at our trees, we judge their health by what we see above the ground. What we don't see below the ground primarily determines the health of the tree above the ground.

Phytophthora root rot has always been one of the largest limiting factors in maintaining profitable production of avocados in Australia.

Most recent estimates indicate that Phytophthora costs the Australian avocado industry over \$20m annually.



Horticultural Notes

Graeme Thomas
GLT Horticulture

My exposure to the avocado industry and *Phytophthora* root rot dates back to 1977.

One of my tasks then was to run a trial program to enable the registration of the fungicide *Aliette* for root rot control in avocados.

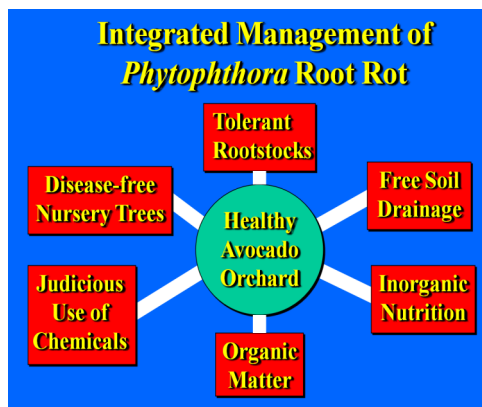
At that time, the Australian avocado industry was centred just north and south of Brisbane and was recovering from the 1974 floods. After that flood around 50% of Australia's avocado trees died. By 2010, the largest producing area was around the Bundaberg area.

In 2010 /11 the Bundaberg region experienced severe flooding. *Phytophthora*, combined with water logging, again reduced production to the point that we were unable to maintain supply to the domestic markets for an extended period.

In the last two seasons, avocado growing areas in the East have had above average rainfall.

Prior to 1974, the only means to manage *Phytophthora* root rot was to stump trees that were in decline.

From 1974, until 2010, *Phytophthora* root rot management had progressed significantly, but losses were still being experienced. One key factor was that many growers, whilst applying fungicides, did not have phosphorous acid levels in the roots capable of maintaining protection. A root level of about 80 mg phosphorous acid/kg throughout the year is considered necessary to prevent the effects of *Phytophthora* root rot.



To manage *Phytophthora* root rot, we need to take an integrated approach, incorporating all the elements of the Pegg Wheel. Whilst all aspects are key, many such as free draining soil, tolerant rootstocks and disease-free nursery trees cannot be altered once your orchard is established. The effective use of fungicides can be managed after trees are planted and are extremely important.

There is an important saying in management, **'If you can't measure it, you can't manage it'**. In the root phosphorus acid root monitoring service, we can measure the effective levels of phosphorous acid in the roots of our trees.

Over the years, I have noticed with all of the grower samples I receive, there is an obvious difference in the results coming from eastern & Western Australia.

I recently averaged all the root analysis results collected from these regions over the past four years in the period of January to June.

	2025	2024	2023	2022
Eastern Australia	34	78	70	43
Western Australia	114	131	122	115

The January to June time slot is when root growth should not be hindered by *Phytophthora* attack. We need an effective root system, not only to sustain the crop the tree is carrying at that time, but to sustain it over the stressful periods of flowering and fruit set.

In East Australia one grower has typical yields of 15- 20 t/ha when the average yield in the East is in the range of 8-10 t/ha. Typical yields in the West range from 15- 35 t/ha.

All growers will recognise the symptoms of tree decline in canopies due to *Phytophthora* root rot but many will not be aware of the not so obvious symptoms that will occur in feeder roots when you have a mild infection.

With sub-lethal infection of *Phytophthora*, your root system is not as effective as it should be. The implications of this are reduced uptake of moisture. The effects of restricted moisture uptake include:

- Reduced nutrient uptake.
- Water stress, particularly at flowering time.
- Reduced yield.
- Inconsistent bearing.
- Smaller fruit size.
- Losses due to incidences of ring neck.
- Reduced fruit quality / robustness.

Fruit Robustness

With industry funding of the Hort Innovation AV21005 'Growing Robust Avocados' project in the last three years, the reliance on healthy roots to produce robust/good quality fruit, has been highlighted as one of the critical factors.

As with the Pegg Wheel, where we need to take an integrated approach in maximising root rot control, in growing robust, quality fruit, we also need to take an integrated approach. It is critical to have a healthy root system that is capable of maximising moisture and nutrient uptake. Without healthy roots, the task of producing robust, good quality fruit becomes increasingly difficult.

To highlight that integrated approach, the project team constructed the Robust Fruit Wheel.

See the Robust Fruit Wheel below.



Healthy roots play a critical role in the production of robust, good quality fruit.

Future Industry Viability

So, when I see a particular area of the Australian avocado industry that over an extended period is not adequately managing one of our major limiting factors, *Phytophthora* root rot, I think back on what has happened in the past.

In looking at the national phosphorous acid feeder root levels, it gives me an early warning as to what may happen if the industry continues on the present path.

Under normal conditions, you may not see the destructive effects of 1974 & 2010/11. But conditions on the eastern Australian avocado production area in the last two seasons have been wetter than average.

Industry implications

Over the years, Avocados Australia Ltd has been working very hard, not only to increase the size of the domestic market, but also to develop a significant export market.

Those efforts can be seen in the increased consumption in the domestic market, and a recent growth in export sales.

To maintain an export market, and further develop domestic consumption, we need continuity of supply of good quality, robust fruit every year.

Why is it so?

The knowledge developed by our researchers and passed on to our growers over the last 40+ years has not been matched by any other avocado industry around the world.

But *Phytophthora* root rot control in the Australian avocado industry remains one of our major limiting factors.

Why?

With the successful research and knowledge we have accumulated over the last 40+ years of managing *Phytophthora* root rot in Australia, is it time we paid **more attention to the detail** of the management required to maintain healthy trees?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR SMALL BUSINESS - PRACTICAL TOOLS



FIONA DIXON
Business Transformation
HLB Mann Judd
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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer that futuristic concept reserved for tech giants; it's now embedded in the everyday tools small businesses use to run their business.

From automating routine tasks to enhancing decision-making, AI is transforming how we work, communicate, and build businesses.

For small businesses, the question isn't "should we use AI?". It's "where can AI help us work smarter?".

Many software platforms now include AI features by default. For example, accounting software like Xero and MYOB use AI to categorise expenses, detect duplicates, and suggest matches. Microsoft Excel offers predictive forecasting, while Outlook drafts email replies and schedules meetings automatically.

You may already be using AI without even realising it.

Below are five practical ways AI is already delivering value and that can be easily used by small businesses:

Standalone AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude)

AI assistants like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Claude can help draft reports, summarise meeting notes, generate emails, and even answer tax or HR questions.

Copilot integrates directly into Microsoft 365 applications, offering support within Excel, Word, Outlook, and Teams. These tools can significantly boost productivity if paired with human oversight.

Marketing and design

Platforms like Adobe Firefly allow businesses to create social media graphics, infographics, and marketing materials on demand, reducing design costs and turnaround times.

DIY AI with low-code platforms

Microsoft Power Platform makes it possible to build AI-powered workflows without writing code.

For example, you can create a tool that scans incoming PDFs, extracts key figures, and updates your workpapers or reporting system automatically.

Custom AI agents in Microsoft Copilot Studio

One of the fastest-growing trends is building custom AI "copilots" to handle specific tasks like chasing overdue invoices, compiling monthly reports, or answering client queries. These agents work within familiar tools like Teams, Excel, and Outlook, operating 24/7.

Agentic AI: the next evolution

Unlike earlier tools that require prompts, agentic AI behaves more like a digital employee. It sets goals, makes decisions, acts across systems, and loops back for feedback without constant instruction.

But what about the risks?

AI may be powerful, but it isn't infallible. It can fabricate facts or reflect biased data. That's why it's essential to combine AI with strong governance and human oversight.

Also, be mindful of where your data is stored, especially when using free tools, to ensure compliance with the Privacy Act 1988.

By laying the groundwork now, your business will be well-positioned to take advantage of AI's next frontier, before it becomes the norm.

Take the time and make the effort to understand AI and how it can benefit your business.

Article courtesy HLB Mann Judd