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Monday, 18 February 2002
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Citrus Growing and Processing - Public Hearings - CITRUS TASTE

Many thanks for the the copy of the Position Paper on Citrus Growing and Processing. We read it with much interest there was much that we learned. I am sorry but owing to illness problems in the family I will not be able to attend the public hearing at Renmark.

I have been a partner in Waikmor Proprietors for 35 years. My uncle the late GG Noble would have shared my views on the aspect of citrus taste. I remember in his younger years that he was quite vocal on this question which he thought was being neglected by the industry as a whole. It is an aspect that we neglect at our own peril. There are so many other fruits that are available currently in retail stores ie so much choice and competition was never greater than it is now. It is so easy for the consumer to overlook the oranges on the shelf and buy something else. Because of the wide choice the consumer is becoming more and more selective and more critical.

Citrus quality particularly with regard to taste has not been much addressed in your report. I have had many comments from friends and acquaintances about poor quality/ texture/ pips in citrus purchased from the shops supermarkets etc. Often they have been given oranges from our property which they say are far superior to those which can be purchased. Clearly these purchasers have been disappointed and would not be rushing to buy oranges again. As far as our plantings are concerned they are 95% on Citrange rootstocks which I consider to give the juiciest and best tasting Navels and Valencias, but maybe the fruit size is down a bit. I have a feeling that on other rootstocks eg rough lemon the fruit size may be OK but the taste is lacking. There seems to me to be too much emphasis on size of fruit possibly at the expense of taste. One partner reported that he purchased oranges whilst interstate without realising that they came from California. They turned out to be the best looking and worst tasting oranges in his experience. Good appearance of fruit may achieve a quick sale but what will be the long term consequences if the fruit does not come up to standard in taste? Perhaps there could be more research on this question taste and how is it possible to objectively measure it?

I think that QA is missing the point in that taste seems to completely overlooked. If the industry does not address this point are we wasting our time?

Are early navels eg Lengs and Navelinas picked too soon with the object of making a fast buck? Would it be better if the industry as a whole lift their standards with regard to juice, sugar and acid contents before picking? You do mention in your report that the consumers tend to be selecting sweeter fruit such as Navels as compared with Valencia's.

I do not seem to get complaints around July and August. I think this is the time when Washington Navels are on the market and these would be one of the best tasting of all Navels and this is the best time to pick and market them. One partner has a colleague in Boston who works with people from the USA. **He was told that these people look forward to purchasing Australian Navel oranges because of their fine taste.**

In our experience the worst tasting of the Navels are the various varieties of summer navels which are below the standard of the Valencia's available in about October and November. An exception to this is the Lanes Late which is almost up to the eating standard of the Washingtons. Once it is this late in the year I usually advise people to buy Valencia's as either an eating orange or for juicing and to put up with the pips. I have even had reports differences between Valencia batches and the number of pips per orange. It seems that pips in oranges whereas they would have been acceptable in the past are no longer acceptable. I know nothing about the new seedless Valencia's and whether they come up to the standard of the traditional Valencia? If they do could they be an alternative to summer navels? I will certainly be trying out the seedless Valencia's myself and would be interested in getting more information.

As you mention in your report, oranges are just marketed as oranges and not as varieties as occurs in the apple industry. Many people do not know the difference between a Valencia and a Navel. The public has to be better informed as to orange varieties and their characteristics.

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