



AOA 'healthy soils' field day at Preston Valley Grove, Donnybrook, WA.

Some 28 olive producers and service providers from 16 WA enterprises attended a very successful field day hosted by [Preston Valley Grove](#) EVOO producer and AOA Director WA Mick Ryan and his team.

AOA CEO Greg Seymour said the participant feedback sheets were extremely positive about the quality of the presenters and their information; as well as the venue, catering, and organization of the day.



Mick Ryan presenting an overview of Preston Valley Grove operations

The Preston Valley Grove

Preston Valley Grove was purchased in 2003 located 16 km west of Donnybrook in the South West Region of Western Australia, the grove comprises 63 Ha, and currently has a total of 2,500 trees, with the initial planting made in 2003. The principal olive varieties being: Frantoio, Coratina, Minerva, Picual, WA Mission, Correggiola.

In addition to the production of premium EVOO, a range of flavoured olive oils are also made by simultaneously processing the olives with citrus fruit (Agrumato Method) or fresh herbs to produce flavoured olive oil with an unparalleled taste and flavour. All additives to the flavoured oils are produced and grown on the farm.

The property, whilst not organic certified, undertakes a range of sustainable development practices. These include:

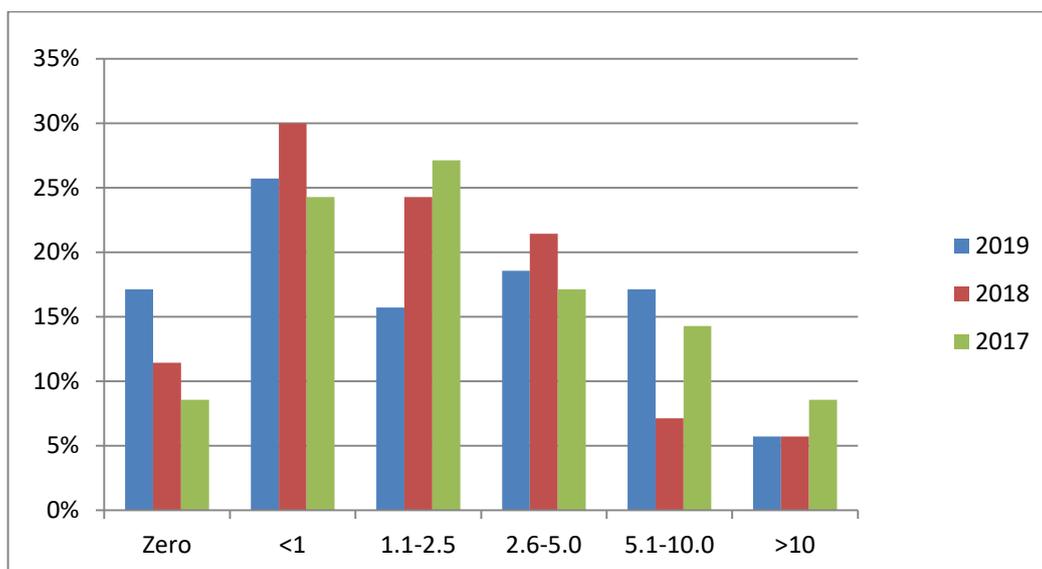
- The use of sheep within the olive grove and property to minimise weeds
- The grazing practice employed minimising slashing within the grove
- Recycling the olive waste produced from the Press into compost and adding it back into the grove and pasture minimising import of fertiliser
- The collection of rain water for olive processing
- The maximising of alternate energy sources, e.g. solar and wind, for power generation
- The property is not connected to the regional electricity grid.
- *Download Mick Ryan's presentation on Preston Valley Grove [here](#)*

Field day participants were treated to a grove walk that covered important grove productivity topics including practical demonstrations addressing a range of critical grove management issues:

AOA's grove productivity program:

The Australian Olive Association (AOA) is convening a series of field days across Australia with a refreshing 'in the field' demonstration approach. The field day series emphasises the important role of healthy soils in producing healthy trees and lifting grove productivity.

Noting a 2019 AOA grower survey that revealed that Australian grove productivity ranges from zero to 15 tonne / ha, with median production <1.0 tonne / ha, and average production of 3.3 tonne / ha, clearly demonstrating the low productivity of many groves in Australia, reflecting the need to address critical grove management issues:



AOA is also emphasising the value of benchmarking grove performance - setting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for improved grove productivity and profitability, including:

- Grove productivity KPIs: kg / tree, tonnes / ha ;
- Cost of production - cost \$/tonne;
- Gross margin - \$/ha

The value of participating in AOA's *OliveCare*® Best Practice Program was also covered, including the use of best practice management checklists, and having access to technical time critical management information.

- *Download AOA's talking points on the OliveCare® best practice program [here](#).*
- *OliveCare® members are able to log in to access best practice checklists [here](#).*

Canopy management:

The key canopy management point is that because olive trees fruit on one year old wood, the tree canopy needs to be rejuvenated over a 6-8 year cycle to maximise the volume of young fruiting wood that is exposed to sunlight. This practice also enables the height of the trees to be lowered making groves more manageable for pest and disease control and harvest.



Andrew Taylor discussing pruning / shaping of young olive trees at Preston Valley Grove, WA.



A pruned olive tree at Wollundry Grove near Wagga Wagga showing 6 months regrowth on 25 year old trees, which will eventually develop into new leaders

With renovation pruning between 25-30% of the canopy can be removed with a single cut between shoulder and waste height on the North facing side of the tree in the first year. This will serve to reduce the height of the tree and stimulate regrowth around the cut that over time will produce new leaders. By removing this limb light will also better penetrate the remainder of the canopy and increase the growth of fruiting wood, and improve fruit set on the remainder of the tree, meaning overall crop yield should increase - not reduce over time.

At Preston Valley Grove Andrew Taylor explained and demonstrated:

- Pruning for sunlight/shade pattern
 - Pruning for tree row volume
 - Pruning for harvest method
 - Pruning for leaf/wood ratio
 - Pruning as cultural practise for disease control
 - Pruning for renewal
 - Pruning for frost reduction
 - Pruning for consistent production
- *View Andrew Taylor's video on olive tree pruning and disease management [Video](#) (7.5 mins).*
 - *Read about the Wollundry Grove canopy renovation program in the Australian & New Zealand Olivegrower and processor: June 2020 edition – pp14-17. Also available on-line to subscribers at: <https://olivebiz.com.au/magazines/olivegrower/back-issues/>*

Soil health and leaf and soil nutrition monitoring with Chris Weiman from C-Wise, WA:



Olive Grove specialist Andrew Taylor supervising the excavation of a soil profile trench at Preston Valley Grove, WA



Chris Weiman from C-Wise discussing soil & leaf sampling and analysis at Preston Valley Grove

A major point made by Chris Weiman from C-Wise is that it is essential for growers to undertake both soil and leaf analysis, and pH to enable a more accurate diagnosis of actual nutrient deficiency, and in designing a grove nutrition program. Sample the same soil sites and trees at least annually to enable comparable data and to read trends. Chris also explained:

- How do you maintain productive groves while streamlining nutrient requirements?
 - How do you manage applications of fertilisers to optimise plant uptake and minimise losses to run-off, leaching or gas emissions?
 - When should I take soil and leaf tests?
 - Why is soil pH important?
 - What fertiliser methods should I use?
 - How do I improve soil biology and carbon in my soils?
 - Building soil nitrogen and nitrogen fixation
 - The use of soil amendments to correct sodic and acidic soils
- Download C-Wise notes on taking soil samples and leaf samples for analysis [here](#)

Making and using compost with Andy Gulliver (C-Wise)



Andy Gulliver (C-Wise) explaining the finer points of making and using high quality compost at Preston Valley Grove, WA.

Andy Gulliver is a mushroom farmer turned entrepreneur and a cofounder of Western Australian company **C-Wise**, which transforms organic carbon into compost. Started in 1996 as Custom Composts by Andy Gulliver and Dave Cullen, the business revolves around the idea that ‘in ten years’ time, we will have made a difference. The difference we are looking to make is creating a world in which organic carbon is truly valued. Valued organic carbon would mean never letting it go to landfill, it would mean managing soils with the goal of maintaining and improving soil organic carbon, and it would mean that we would do these things not just for a warm and fuzzy feeling, but because we don’t think that there is really any other choice.

Andy explained and demonstrated:

- Composting
 - Compost recipe
 - Compost application rates
- Soil water
 - Collecting more water
 - Holding more water
 - Giving back more water
- Soil carbon
 - Living carbon
 - Simple carbon
 - Complex carbon

- How we lose soil carbon
 - How we can build soil carbon
 - How to keep soil carbon
 - Measuring soil carbon
- Download Andy Gulliver's (C-Weise) talking points on composting and soil carbon [here](#)
 - Download Compost for Soils trial at Regans Ford olive grove WA [here](#), and Guide your Compost Application [here](#).
 - For more information on compost and composting click [here](#)



Preston Valley Grove field day participants reported they had a 'great day' and were provided 'timely information and practical demonstrations'.

AOA has received very positive feedback from field day participants, and is now interesting to hear what participants have been inspired to do with their field day learnings, and to track these outcomes over coming years.