



The Research Times

October 2004

Serve-Ag Research Pty Ltd A new company is born!

From July 1, 2004, Serve-Ag Research Pty Ltd commenced trading as a separate company. Serve-Ag Research has always operated independently but the new company arrangement formally recognises the different core strengths of the various business groups. Serve-Ag Research Pty Ltd will continue to build its reputation as one of Australia's leading agricultural research companies.

If you have any questions about the new company structure, please contact Ian Macleod on (03) 6423 2044 or email imacleod@serve-ag.com.au.



What we've been up to.....

It has been a hectic winter of writing and issuing reports. Our report editing team has been going flat chat, and they have a three-foot stack of issued reports to show for their efforts. They feel it's beyond counting so they just point daily to the size of the growing pile....

Some of our field staff were hoping for a quieter time over winter, but that didn't happen. No sooner had they finished their reports, than clients were on the phone planning the next season of trials. Field work in broadacre crops is already well and truly underway across all regions.

The administration team is dealing admirably with the challenges of getting a new company

up and running – everything from new order books to client invoices. They are also trialing a new project management system, which will enable better tracking, and progress reporting of projects.

Across the country, our researchers have been speaking at industry discussion days. This is a fantastic opportunity to formally give feedback to growers who, directly or indirectly, make our trial work possible. In the coming season, growers will be adopting a range of practices that have resulted from work done by our researchers, eg. weed management in pyrethrum and incorporation of brassica green manure crops into paddock rotations.

We now have a new web address, which is www.serveagresearch.com.au, and the site will be revamped over the next couple of months. In the future, we will require that all recipients of our newsletter register online to receive their updates. This protects privacy and ensures that unwanted emails are not being dumped into people's inboxes. We will let you know as soon as this facility is available on our web site. If you wish to be removed from our current mailing list please contact us.

Please note that the postal address for the Serve-Ag Research Head Office is 16 Hillcrest Road, Devonport Tasmania 7310, Australia.

From Stanthorpe to Europe (twice)

only Stephen Tancred could be so lucky!

Stephen Tancred of Stanthorpe has been fortunate to visit Europe on horticultural projects twice in the past year. Last July he teamed up with 12 other horticulturalists and toured research orchards and vineyards in Germany, France and Italy. In particular, several orchards treated with BASF's new growth regulator (Regalis) were inspected. Stephen described this product as "one of the most exciting new developments for apple growers in 20 years." Since returning, Stephen has conducted detailed field experiments with Regalis in vigorous Royal Gala and Pink Lady apple orchards and has reported enormous commercial benefits in growth control. This work will be used to assist registration of Regalis for Australian growers, which should be finalised for the 2005-06 season.

Stephen was also part of a a three-member team of observers at the 10th International Workshop on Fire Blight, held at Bologna, Italy. Stephen's trip report will be used to bolster the industry's response to Biosecurity Australia's proposal to import apples to Australia. Stephen is well respected by the Australian apple industry and has supported them in their numerous fire blight campaigns.



Staff at the annual Serve-Ag Research Conference in Launceston, Tasmania, in May 2004

The Research Times

Crop Science & Technology Congress

Ian Macleod does us proud

The "Brighton Conference" has been a prominent event on the global crop protection industry calendar for many years. Last November the organisers made a major change in the format of this event, and in the process, the Congress moved north from the popular English seaside resort to Glasgow, "Europe's fastest growing conference destination".

Ian Macleod attended Crop Science & Technology 2003, presenting the paper, "Evaluation of the plant defence booster, acibenzolar-S-methyl for use in Australian agriculture"; and the poster, "Evaluation of oxadiargyl herbicide in various Australian horticultural crops".

The Congress traditionally includes announcement of new crop protection compounds and provides an indication of what new products may become available in the coming years. In recent times, the trend has been for fewer compounds to pass through initial screening, and the result is a need to focus more on integrated crop management practices and optimum use of existing products.

One of the issues discussed in various sessions was the availability of crop protection products in minor crops. This, of course, is a very important issue in Australia, and one that Horticulture Australia is actively addressing.

Crop Science & Technology 2004 will be held in Glasgow from 1-3 November. For more details visit www.bcpc.org.

While in Glasgow, Ian was able to spend time with our partners from the French company, Staphyt. This included a visit to their headquarters in the northern French village of Inchy en Artois. Serve-Ag Research will continue to link with Staphyt to ensure that we are kept up to date with the latest global products and technologies being trialed in Europe.

GLP – an update from our auditor, Jane Floyed



Early in August I attended a training course on the OECD Principles of Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) at the NATA* office in Melbourne, which was presented by Louise Calder. Both the course and supporting training material were excellent.

It was a great opportunity to have NATA (as the auditing authority) define the GLP compliance requirements and, having worked with the Serve-Ag Research system for 2 years, I was in a good position to make a judgement on our progress. This has been very good; however, the change in the operation of Research from a business group to a Pty Ltd company necessitates the re-issue of the GLP Manual, and we are looking to make some improvements.

GLP has another meaning – "Get Lots of Paper", and we are quite good at this as well! Obviously, our documentation meets compliance requirements, but we can also look at whether it can be transferred to reports with ease; whether it contains unnecessary information; whether some forms can be combined to prevent repetition, and the use of electronic facilities etc. We are now working towards maintaining our compliance with a strong focus on increasing efficiency and cost-effectiveness, to better serve our clients.

To achieve this, we insist that all GLP operators immediately document and notify identified problems by using our Standard Operating Procedure – Managing Non-Compliance and Corrective Action Requests. This is one area where I sense there is still some confusion with operators and clients. I hope the following information will help clarify definitions. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any questions regarding GLP compliance.

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What is corrective and preventative action??

Corrective action = Fixing a problem that has occurred and changing the relevant process so that the same problem does not occur again.

Preventative action = Being clever enough to identify a potential problem before it occurs and putting a procedure in place to prevent it from occurring.

When something does go wrong, it is important to fix the problem immediately. The Study Director must be notified.

However, it is much more important to fix the aspect of the system that caused the problem. This is a true corrective action.

For the Corrective and Preventative Action System to be effective we have to avoid a 'witch-hunt' mentality; rarely does anyone intentionally make a mistake and most of the time it is outside the individual's control.



True cause/s, typically come from problems in one or more of the following:

UNDERSTANDING	DOCUMENTS
issues of training, lack of clear information about the task, infrequently reading procedures	problems with availability, currency, validation, depth, the way they are written or formatted
RESOURCES	ATTITUDE
problems with equipment or its calibration, the testing environment, materials, samples, planning, checks or controls	morale, inattention, wrong person for the job

At Serve-Ag Research, we have become very good at using the corrective and preventative action process. Interest and input from our personnel and operators continues to make our system more efficient and compliant. We also welcome feedback from our clients.

*NATA = National Accreditation and Training Authority. NATA is the organisation that monitors compliance with the OECD Principles of GLP in Australia.



A day in the life of a Serve-Ag Researcher.....

We are still waiting for the day when they make a TV series about agricultural scientists....in the meantime, here is a day in the life of one of our researchers from Devonport. The pace there leaves those doctors at All Saints looking for some action!

5.00 am: Scrabble madly to turn off mobile phone alarm...lose phone under bed but awake by time it has finished beeping. It's a calm morning – perfect spraying weather.

7.00 am: Finish spraying trial. Packing up gear when phone rings – the farmer wants someone to have a look at the yellowed stunting in the bottom corner of his carrot paddock. Could it be herbicide damage? He's going to have words with that contractor if it is! Collect soil and crop samples and take photos and then ring his agronomist.

7.30 am: Client phone calls start... marketing man from a US company wants a quote for disease work in apples, strawberries and cherries. 'Are there protocols for the trials?' He doesn't know. Explain that it's quite challenging to quote without knowing what will be involved in the trials.

8.00 am: Turn on computer and contemplate overnight miracle of 63 emails from all over the world. Eliminate 50 offers of bank accounts and anatomical enlargements, and start on the remainder of meaningful emails. That marketing man needs to have his budget finalised in the US next week. Fortunately, his technical staff have sent protocols and some information about mode of action of the product. After phone calls to other



researchers, APVMA, regional agronomists and following up with a few good growers, it is nearly all sorted. Just waiting on some quotes for the GLP component of the trials. Celebrate efficiency with a cup of tea and raid of the biscuit barrel.

10.30 am: Agronomist drops in with a new weed. What is it? Reference books consulted, but can't be 100% positive on the identification.



Package up specimen and send down to state herbarium, with a note on possible identification. Anticipate gleeful call from the State's No. 1 weed botanist – there is nothing he loves more than a new weed challenge! Anticipate distressed call from farmer – what does he do about it?

11.00 am: Need a permanent marker to label some trial supplies for despatch, but none seem to be visible. All obviously hidden out of sight of marauding field staff. Just about to sneak into laboratory, where there is a good stash hidden in the third drawer down, but "Do not enter – trial in progress" sign triggers my conscience.

11.30 am: Pick up George Johnson from the airport. George is one of our most loyal (and entertaining) clients. I take him back to the office, and he delightedly extracts all our news from the ladies at the front desk.

1.30 pm: Finally have to march George out of the office so that we can get to our presentation in time. We are talking to a potato industry forum. George's presentation follows a very dry academic presentation. It is obvious that the grower audience is far, far away, but George starts with one of his cringingly bad jokes and at least they are watching. By the time I'm up to talk on trial results, the questions are coming from everywhere.

3.00 pm: Drive by potato trial sites on way back to airport. Of course George will never know the epics we had trying to get them in, when the ground was absolutely sodden in spring. Catch up on multiple missed calls on way back from airport. If I've got a moment, could I please....a) confirm attendance at AgSafe training session; b) talk to broccoli grower group down the coast; c) email abstract for weeds conference; d) finalise HAL funding proposal by Monday; and e) pick up lamb chops for dinner?

3.30 pm: Finally make it to barley trial site to see how crew have been getting on for the day. The small plot harvester had a few cranky turns early in the day, but is now running like a dream at the final site. The team looks sweaty, dusty, but efficient. I start loading chaff bags in to the utes, while they finish off.

5.00 pm: Measure and record grain yields from each plot. There are a couple of stand out treatments, but it's early days yet - still 5 more sites to harvest. Check weather and pack ute for tomorrow's spray – trial site is two hour's drive so need an early start to make it before the wind gets up. Already dreaming of the vanilla slice I will pick up fresh from the bakery at 7am tomorrow morning....





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