



Insight

From front page

sectors plus its store and administration staff have been retained.

Farmlands Trading Society is the country's leading rural merchandise co-operative with an aggressively expanding coverage throughout the North Island.

Both companies were independently looking at growth strategies and quickly recognised there were benefits for each and their respective customer bases from a joint approach.

"We had identified that the horticulture sector was a growth market for us but we also acknowledged we needed greater technical resource than was presently available within our organisation," says Farmlands chairman, Lachie Johnstone.

"By combining Skeltons' resources with our existing infrastructure and strengths, we now offer a highly respected service supported by a first-class technical advisory field force to help our horticulture customers grow."

Farmlands has 33 rural merchandise stores around the North Island and starting in Hawke's Bay, the Skeltons service forms a platform for Farmlands to build and roll out a horticulture strategy into other areas.

"This is a great opportunity for our team to share their skills and knowledge to enhance the horticultural presence of Farmlands in other regions," says David Allan.

EIT students reap rewards of hard work

Juggling full-time work, a family and studying for the three-year National Certificate of Horticulture at EIT is all in a day's work for the 2007 recipients of the Skeltons Excellence Awards.

Final year graduate Hana Tangohau (pictured left) was the recipient of the Skeltons Year 3 Excellence in Horticulture award and received a \$750 cash prize, while Ibrahim Centinturk (second right) was awarded the Skeltons Year 2 Excellence Award and has had this year's EIT fees of \$650 paid.

Hana is a mother of young sons and works for apple orchardist, John Falls. She was previously awarded the Year 2 Excellence Award in 2006.

Originally from Turkey, Ibrahim works for Crasborns orchard and is in charge of about 100 hectares of crop, with a number of staff working for him. His innovative approach to learning and work was the reason he was selected for the award.

Ian Gold and David Allan, of Skeltons, say they



were very pleased with the standards produced by last year's students.

"I think what drives these students is both the desire to learn and the realisation that this is what they are good at. They have discovered that horticulture is their vocation," says David.

"The industry applauds successes like these and will continue to encourage our students to achieve high standards of learning and to carry on with their independent research," says Ian.

"We look forward to seeing who will take out this year's top awards, no doubt there will be tough competition."

Oberon- the smart performer

Skeltons' greenhouse grower clients are benefiting from new technology called Oberon - an insecticide that sets new standards for mite and whitefly control.

Oberon is based on the new active

'spiromesifen' and comes from a new chemical family that controls eggs, nymphs and larvae stages of the two-spotted mite and greenhouse whitefly. Mode of action is contact with excellent residual activity.

Local grower, Dick Tripp from Flowerland Cut Flowers in Clive used Oberon this season and is very impressed with the results to date. Whitefly, the plague of his gerbera crop, causes debilitating effects on plants and workers alike but Dick says that this year has been different.

"After using Oberon I've seen the cleanest plants in years with excellent crop safety on all blooms," he says.

Best control of pests is achieved when Oberon is used as a high volume wet spray - perhaps one downside of the product but one well worth tolerating to achieve best results in the year-round battle that is greenhouse flower growing.

Predator friendly to Encarsia and Bombus species, Oberon should be used as a block of two at seven to 10 days apart (with a maximum of three pairs per year). Consequently two other blocks of chemistry should be alternated in the overall resistance management programme.

As always, Oberon should be applied at the early developmental stages. Adult stages of pests are not affected by the insecticide, however egg-laying is strongly reduced resulting in reduced pest numbers overall.

Thinking growers like Dick Tripp appreciate new chemistry especially when it involves control of mite and whitefly. Now with Oberon, customers of Flowerlands can further appreciate their efforts and quality grown blooms for many years to come.

"Our flowers are looking stunning and our customers agree. Those pests don't stand a chance," says Dick.

Should you require further information on any articles in this newsletter, or on any other matter relating to horticulture, please contact us on 06 876 8029, email info@skeltons.co.nz or call our technical field team direct.



Skeltons Ian Gold (left) and David Allan with Farmlands Chief Executive Peter Ellis (centre).

Skeltons and Farmlands strengthen horticultural service

This month Skeltons and Farmlands joined forces to offer their respective customers even stronger horticulture services.

Skeltons continues to be a separate horticultural specialist entity operating independently from Farmlands core merchandising activities, at its present site in Ruahapia Road Hastings, under Skeltons' current management of Ian Gold and David Allan.

"Our customers will continue to deal with the same people and receive the same level of service, but with the combined purchasing power of both companies we can now offer a wider range of products at better prices," says Ian Gold, General Manager Skeltons and Farmlands Horticulture.

"In addition, our customers who are Farmlands shareholders are eligible for the Farmlands annual bonus rebate and can take up the various options and services available to its shareholders."

Skeltons team of nine technical advisors working primarily in the pipfruit, stonefruit, viticulture, and cropping

Continued on back

Here's to the next seven years of growth

When we purchased Skeltons seven years ago we bought a business respected for the integrity of its technical advisory team and the horticultural advisory knowledge that team provided. At the time we believed the business had significant potential for growth.

Thanks to excellent client support over the past seven years, the business has grown from strength to strength - justifying for us the increase of the field team from five to nine; increasing our customer service staff from two to four (and six in the season); developing our knowledge base and technical expertise to a very high level; and strengthening relationships with existing and new clients across the board.

We have increased our market presence by significantly strengthening our viticultural service; committed to a major investment to relocate to a new office, store and research facility; operating under a new brand; added new products and services to our offering; participated in industry issues like sustainability, Agrecovery, and many industry good activities.

So when the time came to look to future growth and perhaps extend our successful model elsewhere, we recognised a business partner with a

strong distribution network would be a sensible choice rather than trying to replicate existing resources.

This led to discussions that culminated in us carrying on as Skeltons and at the same time teaming up with Farmlands to develop a joint strategy in horticulture.

We have derived great personal satisfaction from the challenges set and met and are confident our latest move with Farmlands will provide additional benefits for our clients, staff and suppliers well into the future.

While it is still very much business as usual it is an opportune time to again thank our clients, staff and suppliers for their most positive support which has and continues to drive us and make all these initiatives possible. Thank you!

IAN GOLD

DAVID ALLAN

Want more information?

TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM

Malcolm Crawford mobile 027 442 8947
 Jeff Kevern mobile 027 442 8945
 Andrew Whitworth mobile 027 442 8946
 Chris Herries mobile 027 443 3910
 Lachlan McKay mobile 027 444 0838

after hours 874 8888
 after hours 844 0324
 after hours 877 2327
 after hours 878 8306
 after hours 870 3833

Blake Herbison
 Evan Walsh
 James Cropper
 Martin Taylor

mobile 027 284 4147
 mobile 027 201 3481
 mobile 027 442 8948
 mobile 027 29 888 00

after hours 870 1212
 after hours 875 0221
 after hours 876 9196
 after hours 879 9906

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233 RUAHAPIA ROAD,
 PO BOX 1330, HASTINGS 4215
 PHONE 06 876 8029
 FAX 06 878 5120
www.skeltons.co.nz



Post harvest vine nutrition

Post harvest to dormancy is an important growth stage where the vine goes into storage mode, translocating nutrients from a healthy canopy back into woody tissue before leaf fall.

At the same time within the soil there is an increased period of root activity, whereby any residual soil nutrients washed in by rain or irrigation are taken up by the roots for storage to sustain vine growth the following season. This watering is important also to help vines recover from being placed under stress pre-harvest.

Magnesium, zinc and boron are essential nutrients for a good flowering and fruit set next season, but trial work done with applying these nutrients post harvest has shown no difference to the untreated the following season. A grape plant in spring will produce four to five leaves before inflorescences are visible and this is a better time to apply these nutrients.

Nitrogen is the nutrient that will have the most dramatic effect on yield, canopy growth in the vineyard, fermentation time and wine quality in the winery. Stored nitrogen provides approximately 20 percent of that used by the vine between budburst and flowering. The remaining 80 percent must be supplied through root uptake from the soil.

If the vine canopy is green and healthy little benefit is gained from nitrogen applications earlier in the season. The post harvest rate of nitrogen application will depend on many factors such as vine age, variety and rootstock, fertiliser source, placement, soil type, moisture, temperature and pH. Petiole analysis at flowering is a good guideline of nitrogen status and assessing effectiveness of past fertiliser applications.

However, nitrogen is also a nutrient that can pose problems in the vineyard with increased vine canopy and yield, soil acidification and pollution of ground water. Therefore it is a nutrient that demands respect in its application.

For more information about nitrogen application or to access any post harvest products or services, contact your Skeltons technical advisor.

Growing interest in bio-stimulants in horticulture

An overview by Malcolm Crawford, Skeltons Technical Advisor

There continues to be increasing interest in the use of products that can be described as bio-stimulants - products that have been a focus for the organic industry since the mid-1990s.

However, interest and awareness is now expanding into the conventional horticulture industry and is being driven by a number of issues:

- A need to produce residue-free produce as demanded by markets.
- A desire to produce crops using more natural products and systems.
- Significant interest in, and research into, alternatives to synthetic products from governments, health entities, growers, suppliers and consumers.

Skeltons continues to be at the 'coal face' with organic growing and is presently increasing our inputs into the technical side of the bio-stimulant arena. This includes representation on an Organics Aotearoa New Zealand (OANZ) steering committee, and significant support, both financially and in kind, to this government-driven initiative.

We are working with researchers and suppliers to better understand the nature of bio-stimulants and one concern we have is the authenticity of some product claims.

As we increase our knowledge of the workings of bio-stimulants we will be better able to assess the viability and potential of particular products.



Malcolm Crawford discusses the benefits of bio-stimulants at a growers meeting.

Trichoderma is a good example of a bio-stimulant. This is a beneficial fungus that has the ability to exclude pathogenic fungi from plants. Other bio-stimulants include seaweeds, fish products, humates and amino acids.

Sitting alongside bio-stimulants are nutrient input products. Nutrients are often combined with bio-stimulants to enhance plant uptake and reduce phytotoxic effects. Skeltons has several trials running this season with nutrient products, with some very interesting results to date.

Our continuing involvement in the bio-stimulant and nutrient fields will serve to bring to our grower clients more exacting knowledge and beneficial use of these products.

We will be reporting the findings of our trials and ongoing research as they come to hand.

Getting the most out of your apple bloom

Waiken™ is a plant growth regulating product available from Skeltons that helps break dormancy and results in a compressed flowering period, without significantly changing the timing of flowering (which occurs with HiCane® and Erger G®).

Formulated from a vegetable oil, it is low in toxicity, has useful surfactant properties, and is a pre-conditioning agent for thinning sprays. The product has traditionally been used on Royal Gala strains to compress bloom and help improve efficacy of bloom thinning sprays.

It has also proven to be useful as a tool to assist in fireblight management on other apple

varieties and young trees by reducing the very spread out and late bloom that can occur. This type of bloom is very susceptible to fireblight, particularly during periods of warm moist weather conditions, when flowers have just opened.

By reducing the flowering span, applications of KeyStrepto™ and Blossom Bless can be better timed and applications minimised.

Fireblight is increasing in importance due to the amount of the highly susceptible M9 rootstocks now growing in Hawke's Bay and Waiken™ is a useful product that can be employed to reduce the effect.

Agrecovery – the way of the future



Hawke's Bay growers and farmers now have increased access to the Agrecovery rural recycling programme with Skeltons coming on board and offering a collection site at our Ruahapia Road store.

Skeltons director, David Allan says the programme had excellent benefits for the environment and the company was keen to support Agrecovery.

"It makes sense for our facility to be a collection site as we are open six days a week during the season and growers purchase agrichemicals from us.

"We are proud to be involved in a project that has the country's

environmental interests at heart," says David.

Bruce Emerson, director of 3R Group that manages Agrecovery, says the addition of Skeltons as a collection site made it easier for farmers and growers to participate in the programme.

Agrecovery was launched in Nelson in April last year and already 50 sites from Winton in the South Island to Kaitia in the North have been established.

The rural recycling programme aims to collect the country's 10 million used agrichemical containers each year.

Nutritional grey areas addressed

Plant nutrition is an important part of crop production and a necessary cost to growers. The science of plant nutrition is well known but there are many grey areas surrounding the choice of products and product efficacy.

This season Skeltons staff has embarked on quite a large research and development programme to look critically at some aspects of plant nutrition in both organic and conventional growing systems.

The results to date have been extremely interesting, confirming much of the scientific evidence already available, and dispelling some of the 'sales talk' theories in the marketplace at present.

The data is not all in at present but we hope to pass on some good practical information to our customers from this year's work soon. We are also planning to continue research from where this work leads in the future.

Organic apple production trials have confirmed the beneficial use of compost and blood and

bone mixes (at the right rates and ratios) over other proprietary mixes and programmes.

This has been heartening to see and confirms Skeltons approach to this method of nutrition over many years has been the right one.

While talking nutrition, the benefits of post harvest nutrition on pip and stonefruit to help set up the crop for next spring is well documented and recommended. Maximising the photosynthetic activity from harvest to leaf fall is critical for healthy flowering, pollination and tree growth for the following spring.

Good soil moisture levels are also critical through the post harvest period to ensure leaf quality remains as high as possible to prevent premature leaf fall.

The two main nutrients to apply at this time are nitrogen and boron, however if magnesium is severely deficient addition of this element now can assist to delay leaf drop.

Talk to your Skeltons advisor about the right post harvest nutrient programme for your orchard or vineyard.

\$10,000 research money available now

Skeltons Viticulture Development Grant has \$10,000 available for research projects now.

An initiative of Skeltons, the grant was established in 2004. It aims to enhance the competitive advantage and future wellbeing of the Hawke's Bay viticulture industry by encouraging originality and fostering continual improvement so that Hawke's Bay remains a leader in viticulture industry innovation.

The \$10,000 grant is offered in conjunction with Hort Research, Ballance Agri-Nutrients and Bayer CropScience New Zealand.

Applications for 2008 funding is now open and all those based in Hawke's Bay and involved in grape growing for wine production are eligible to enter. Projects must have relevance and application in Hawke's Bay (although those being of benefit to other regions as well are not automatically precluded).

For application forms or more information contact Skeltons on (06) 876 8029.

Martin Taylor – part of growing team



Seven months as part of the Skeltons team and Martin Taylor, former partner in Taylor Pinchin and Associates is well and truly settled into his role as technical advisor to a growing number of the Bay's pip and stonefruit growers.

After 30 years horticultural experience, with the last 16 years consulting in his own business, Martin says it was "dead easy" to become part of a team approach. "The guys are all supportive and

there's a huge amount of collective knowledge to draw on and add to."

In addition to providing existing and new Skeltons' customers with advice on pest and disease, tree management, nutrition, crop loading and other matters relating to crop production, Martin has been looking at fireblight control on young trees planted on dwarf rootstock with a view to better management of this problem. (See separate Waiken article).

He is also available to work with

growers wanting to redevelop or establish new plantings, providing advice on the practical and financial aspects involved. He is envisaging this work will pick up in the coming months as harvest progresses.

Overall Martin is enjoying his new role and while learning more about the product range stocked is new, essentially he believes his focus is as it always was and in line with the Skeltons philosophy of helping the grower grow – quality produce and a healthy bottom line.