Transcription details:

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| Date: | 6-Apr-2016 |
| Input sound file: | From Citrus to Almonds |

Transcription results:

**0:00 (light, easy music)**

0:08 Hello, my name's Simon Vause.

0:10 I run the property here that we're at.

0:13 It's a 20 hectare property.

0:16 We are about 15 kilometers from the Victorian border

0:20 on the Murray River.

0:23 The property here is a difficult one

0:24 for growing fruit on because

0:26 we're actually on a split level

0:27 so we probably have a height differential

0:29 of about 20 meters.

0:31 Being a split level property means we have

0:32 quite a variation of soil types

0:35 from clay up in the front corner

0:38 to essentially beach sand down by the river.

0:42 We have very hot summers

0:45 and very, very cold winters.

0:48 With the right amount of water

0:49 and the right management technique,

0:51 you can just about grow anything

0:52 here in the river land.

0:54 Depending on how far we go back,

0:55 this property was a classic, small ownership

0:58 fruit salad block.

1:00 We had oranges, we had lemons

1:03 and apricots, plums.

1:05 But our decision came early on

1:07 to actually plant almonds here.

1:10 Long term strategy probably 18 years ago

1:12 to put the almonds in,

1:14 and I suppose we have progressively

1:16 been changing out of all those other types

1:19 of fruits into, well by this time next year,

1:23 we will be 100% almond property.

1:28 The change out of the citrus was probably

1:30 the most traumatic decision that we had to make.

1:33 There was a huge number of factors

1:35 that influenced that decision.

1:38 When you look at the economics in our industry,

1:40 it can be a case of whether your product will sell or not.

1:43 And that was a critical element for us in citrus.

1:47 We made a bold decision, so--

1:50 But when you look at the economics

1:51 of that rationale, sometimes it was a case

1:54 of just being able to sell your product.

1:56 At the time, the high end product,

1:59 you know, the best of it, the A class fruit,

2:01 well that went to, exported to the United States

2:04 and to Japan, and then secondary fruit

2:08 was sold domestically, and then your third grade fruit,

2:10 there was a thriving juice market for citrus juice.

2:14 Well, that market dried up so therefore up to 40%

2:20 suddenly had no home and was being dumped.

2:22 When your industry's in a bit of a trough

2:24 like citrus was back when the decision was made,

2:27 you either hang in there tough,

2:29 through the tough times,

2:31 or you make a bold decision and make a change.

2:35 So when we plant the almonds, you're looking at

2:37 about year six before they become profitable

2:40 in their own right.

2:41 Horticulture, and almond trees especially,

2:43 being a big, permanent planting,

2:46 six years, even for us, that's the short timeline.

2:50 We're looking at a 30 year lifespan for these trees.

2:54 From a labor point of view, generally throughout the year,

2:57 I'm able to do the bulk of the work.

2:59 So, maintaining the irrigation,

3:01 keeping the trees nice and wet,

3:03 fertilising, orchard hygiene,

3:06 so keeping the place weed free.

3:08 There are times of the year, though,

3:09 where we'll get, I'll get a contractor in

3:12 to prune the trees.

3:14 So prune the sides down so we can get

3:16 the machinery down the rows.

3:18 And, of course, at harvest time we use a contract company

3:20 to harvest the almonds.

3:23 At about the time of harvest,

3:24 we have about anywhere between 15% and 20%

3:27 of the nuts have already fallen onto the ground.

3:30 Now, in any other industry, you would panic

3:32 at the sight of your fruit and nuts on the ground,

3:37 but in the almond industry when we get to harvest,

3:41 the first machine that comes in is the shaker.

3:44 It has a pair of clamps that go around each tree,

3:46 and shakes the nuts off of them

3:48 It's quite an amazing sight to see.

3:50 From there there is a machine, a sweeper essentially,

3:54 that sweeps the nuts from in and around the tree

3:58 out into the middles of the rows,

3:59 into essentially a windrow,

4:01 and then the third and final machine comes through

4:04 which is the pickup.

4:05 Essentially digs up the first couple of millimetres of dirt

4:09 which in turn picks up all the almonds,

4:12 and puts them through, blows all the dust back out,

4:15 and puts it into a trailer which it's carrying on behind.

4:18 Leaves me with almonds harvested

4:20 and a nice, clean orchard.

4:23 So, once their almonds have been harvested,

4:25 they then travel a very short distance.

4:28 The almond huller and sheller, owned by Almond Co.,

4:32 is only about three kilometres down the road from us here.

4:35 From there, those almonds are then

4:37 transported to the Almond Co. factory.

4:41 We entered into, a long time ago,

4:45 a long term agreement, supply agreement

4:48 with Almond Co. which was the best decision

4:50 we ever made.

4:52 And they are responsible for 100%

4:56 of our almond sales on our behalf, so.

4:58 The business is a cooperative

5:00 which means its owned by the growers,

5:02 and it just works terrifically.

5:05 They're a forward thinking company,

5:07 and are always planning for the ever increasing

5:11 volumes of almonds that are being produced

5:14 here in Australia.

5:16 The biggest thing from my own personal point of view

5:18 I like is that I'm a shareholder in the company.

5:22 The profit that that cooperative makes,

5:24 and they do make a healthy profit,

5:26 is either poured back into growing the business,

5:28 or comes to us as a dividend.

5:31 Annual investments we have,

5:33 pumping costs with electricity,

5:35 and then very close behind that

5:36 is our fertilizer costs.

5:40 Is a huge component of the money that we spend.

5:44 And I have to make sure that every piece of nitrogen,

5:48 every piece of iron, you know, is put in the right spot

5:52 at the right time to maximize our return.

5:55 We want to in Australia, and we need to,

5:58 grow our production numbers so that we can

6:02 get into those export markets of India and China

6:06 that is where there's a massive demand for almonds.

6:10 (light easy music)