

RLF REVISITS CITRUS GROVE

This Insight ponders the question of how and why some growers get into difficulties with cost-effective performance of their **orchards** and shows how risk can be reduced with a nutritionally balanced **RLF Fertigation and Foliar program**.

By Richard Stone



Michael (the Ag. Officer) is pictured standing by a lemon tree that is showing clearly visible signs of nutrient deficiency (or toxicity). The lemon grove, along with 400 hectares of assorted citrus – mainly oranges – is being grown at Hillston in New South Wales, under the Martinez System of Open Hydroponics.

I recently spent some time with an Agricultural Services Officer talking to horticulture growers in NSW's Riverina region

Marketing RLF products into the Horticulture Industry can be a very time consuming operation, as the degree of knowledge required about the Growers' requirements such as quality, yield and market trends is quite varied. Further it is influenced greatly by nutrition, water supply, and soil type.

RLF have, from time to time, supplied the Citrus Grove with foliar products but some four years ago the Growers made the decision to install the Martinez system across the whole area believing that such a system would allow for programmed nutrition.

However it is interesting to note that after four years their fertiliser inputs have sky-rocketed and there seems to be some doubt as to whether the program is sustainable.

We are now working closely with the grower on the lemon grove and taking soil samples. With the assistance of RLF's Plant Physiologist Dr Hooshang Nassery we will be able to recommend what we believe to be a more effective and sustainable management program for the citrus growing operation.

(For those who need an explanation; 'Open Hydroponics' is an adaptation of commercial soil-less hydroponics to soil based production. The aim is to reduce the influence of the soil as a storage medium and use the soil to anchor the tree and deliver nutrient solutions to the roots. Open Hydroponics has the potential to increase orchard productivity, but there are risks that could reduce productivity, increase leakage of nutrients and increase root-zone soil salinity. These risks include an unreliable water supply and inadequate management skill. A misjudgement in nutrient application rates could impact on yield and fruit quality by a deficiency or toxicity of specific nutrients and an increase in root-zone salinity. Strategic leaching irrigations may be required to reduce root-zone salinity. The timing of leaching irrigations will need to be carefully managed to ensure that excessive nutrients are not washed past the root zone).

It's little wonder that some Growers can get into difficulties with the cost-effectiveness of the performance of their orchards and groves.

Growers can take out the guess work and reduce their 'risks' with a simple yet cost-effective nutritionally balanced **RLF Fertigation and Foliar program**.