

President report

February 2012.

Since our last Board meeting, Oct/11, we all have had a busy season harvesting with Christmas activities and summer visitors. Weather patterns have made a lot of difference to the harvest this year, with plenty of rain in spring, and also at Christmas; some had it good, some not so good. During the 3 days from 24th- 26th December we received 4 inches of rain. It was good to have the Lavender all picked & bunched, hanging to dry.

Some of our growers had difficulties in getting their lavender picked, due to illness and leaving their properties for family business. I tried to get nearby members to cut the lavender, but at that time, everyone had their own to harvest, and to get the man power to get a job done presented some problems.

Something to think about! What about turning yourself in to a contract harvester? This could be extra income, using local labour, or backpackers, there is always someone willing to work. A suggestion! Buy the crop at, e.g.; \$1 bush, providing it is good quality, and then dry, to sell as bunches or stripped lavender.

"*Scintimental Collection.*" and "*Lavender Trail*" brochures have been mailed out to members that are open for tourism, and relevant information centres. **Members:** You should stock tourism outlets that are named in the Lavender Trail brochure with at least two different products of the Collection. (As advertised in the brochure) even though we would encourage people to buy from you.

We have introduced another product to the "*Collection*". "*Scintimental Mist*" is hydrosol lavender water in 250ml purple bottle with our well known label. Look on the web site for purchase order form, or email to myself or Secretariat. If any time you are giving garden talks etc, why not take along our products to show the public, what our Association produces, using all Australian grown lavender oil, & flowers.

The Conference: Registration forms are being sent out. To enable us to finalise conference plans please read all information carefully and return asap. We encourage you to invite anyone you know who might be interested in lavender to attend (the Thursday at least) Keep dates available 3rd-5th May at Berri in South Australia.

We are revising the application form for joining TALGA. The new application highlights member's rights and discounts. Please note when you receive your renewal notices and return with the appropriate information. If any problems or queries, do not hesitate to contact myself or our Secretariat. Phone or email.

Looking forward to catching up with you all at the Conference.

Yours in Lavender

Jean Sargeant

President.

Out and About

Tasmania: Robert Ravens

After a very wet Spring, we have experienced a long dry Summer. Flowering was lush and dense and harvesting of "Bridestowe Philippa" commenced on December 15. This clone is the basis of our culinary Lavender and approximately 5 tonnes was cut, dried and processed by December 24. Harvesting and distillation for oil commenced on December 26. The crop was in perfect condition and the sequential ripening of "Bridestowe Ann" followed by "Bridestowe Elizabeth", "Bridestowe Myra" and

finally “Bridestowe Jennifer”, together with the introduction of our second harvester have delivered stunning results. Harvesting was completed in 4 weeks instead of the nominal 6 weeks.

Oil volume and quality will rival the best “Denny” years, indicating the realisation of the replanting programme together with continuous improvements in our harvesting and distillation protocols.

Tourist numbers have also been very strong, with a surge in interest from visitors from Mainland China and Hong Kong. China appears to have a fascination with lavender and the concept and experiences associated with “Agritourism”.

There has been substantial discussion in the local media about a plan put forward by EOT to engage local farmers in the growing of lavender to supply oil to the French market. The ravages of fungal diseases and insect pests have been very visible in Provence for some years and there is a conspicuous demand for quality *Lavandula angustifolia* oils from other countries.

EOT’s projections do not correlate sensibly with field data from Tim Denny’s rich experience. However, there is, without doubt, potential for Australian growers to deliver product into international markets providing they have the capital, patience and skills to produce 500kg per annum on a reliable basis (ie minimum of 250,000 plants/ 20 hectares).

Yarra Valley: Jean Sargeant

In the Yarra Valley, harvest was much better than the season before, due to good spring rains & warm sunshine to warm the soils. Both varieties, almost bloomed at the same time, *Lavandula angustifolia*, started in mid November, followed by the *Lavandula x intermedia* varieties in first week in December. Two weeks earlier than usual providing good yields for cut flowers and Christmas time markets. Warratina Lavender Farm experienced the same, with pickers from France to help get the crop picked.

With the difference in weather patterns, compared with 2010 harvest, the rain has made all the difference to the Lavender. After picking the bushes, I can notice that the plants are not stressed. Some are even still sending up flower stems, because the soil has plenty of moisture in it with plenty of summer sun. Overall, this season has been excellent.

Queensland: Tere Bonner

The past year has been difficult as we have had so much rain since October 2009 - and it is still raining. We really have had little resemblance to definite seasons - very nice really! The paddocks have never been so good and the cattle are thriving. However, we lost 3,000 plants out of our 20,000 and replanted too soon and are still replanting for a second time. These losses are despite the lavender being hulled and on slopes and on the top of a hill. The harvest was not huge as so many plants are small but we have been able to strip a good quantity to more than cover our year. The oil on the other hand has been magnificent. We are so pleased with the quality and the quantity will more than take us through the year. Crystal Ridge Lavenders also lost many plants.

The best news is: I purchased a dehumidifier to assist in keeping the rooms dry through all the rain as the small ones from the supermarket were being used up so quickly. The dehumidifier unit cost around \$350 and takes approximately 2.5 litres of water from the air per room in 24 hours. As the lavender was not drying sufficiently to strip properly I had the idea that if the partly dried lavender was in a small space the dehumidifier could finish the job. We have a toilet block from the mines with a laundry on one end. This has been stripped out, sealed and window covered. The resulting bunched lavender is dry and we strip it off and replace with another 10 - 15 baskets and dry that. This means that there is a definite amount to strip and nobody minds if the job. It can be finished in a day and the next lot is a day or so later. The quality is also much better as the stripped lavender is a better colour and perfectly dry and so all the buds come off the stems. This takes the pressure off trying to get all the drying done and bunches stripped in a very short space of time.

Rotary have for the past 3 years run a "Legends in the Lavender" - basically a Country /Western event featuring local and young people at "Aloomba Lavender" as the open spaces make it a very good venue, but the weather uncertainty as put an end to these events.

No doubt most farms are feeling the pinch with the Global Financial difficulties but Trish and I feel confident that tourism will pick up again soon. We have had our fair share of visitors, although it is noticeable that they are not spending as freely as this time last year. The products we make are very popular and make a good profit, so when we have spare time we produce as much as we can to have a good stock ready for the good times.

The new Tourist Trail brochures have been very well received and we would like to thank the Board for this very popular initiative.

Western Australia: Bruce Bebbington

We are still harvesting, if the weather stays on our side, we may get another two weeks of harvesting. During the harvest, in the last week of December, we had a run of very hot weather and were concerned we would have a very short time to harvest; however, cooler weather followed resulting in extended picking season for our fresh and dried flowers.

To date we have harvested 75 per cent more bunches than last year and the paddock barely looks touched, with some cultivars yielding over three times the flower harvested in previous years. Most plants were planted in 2000, yet still increasing the yield of flowers.

We received a good write-up in the January/February edition of Small Farms Magazine, the second time they have approached us and done an article.

Southern NSW: Judith Basile

Rain! Rain! Go away! Like almost everyone we have been struggling with wet weather and harvesting. With the limited supplies of dried lavender, we have concentrated on bunches for stripping. Along with this we have stored enough for demonstration distillations that have been booked throughout the year. The *Crystal Brook* still is transportable, and gives a great opportunity to promote the industry and TALGA at various locations.

I have made contact with a number of people regarding "harvest trails" and these look to be an excellent way for everyone to either join the trail or use local members to promote their products. Most tourist bureaus are happy to promote their local "trails" on their web site, thus inexpensive advertising for you.

With Jean, Michael and I are attending the Melbourne Herb & Chilli Festival (March 17/18th) Jean is concentrating on TALGA products and I am concentrating on lavender (and herbs and chilli) in food. We have a label for the food side *CB Innovative Country Cooking* with a new label. Products include cookies, various oils (organic) and vinegars, provincial herb salt rub, lavender sugar, lavender jams and honey, chilli and sesame honey etc. It has been a crazy cooking spree! AND I am to do a cooking demo!...Don't worry! I have the gear!!

CONFERENCE: May 3-5th inclusive at Berri. SA. The conference is designed to encourage an increase in lavender growers. The more we have the greater the impact on world markets and if we are to be a force to be reckoned with, we must increase yields. I would ask all of you to promote the conference to anyone you know who is interested, or who could utilise the income from another crop. (It goes great with other niche crops: olives, grapes, truffles, fruit growers etc.)

It is also important that members are available to support prospective growers. The open forum and AGM needs members who have input to the Association. The Board can only do so much! (and Jean is to be congratulated on getting out the *Scintimental Mist & Trail* brochure.)

If you do not have conference registration forms, please contact Jean or myself urgently.

Questions & Answers

I have harvested my lavender and it is hanging in the shed. How long will it take to dry?

The drying of lavender is subject to weather conditions. Hot, dry aerated spaces will dry bunched lavender in a few days. Damp weather makes all the difference. It is ready to strip when you can easily rub off the heads. See Tere Bonner's article re drying. One of the best early drying rooms that I saw was a metal garden shed, sprayed inside with foam, with an air vent (exhaust fan) and a fan heater: simple and effective. It gave a great colour and the bunches dried very quickly.

How do you extract (strip) the dried lavender bunches?

There are commercial stripping machines, but we simply sit over a big bin and rub the bunched lavender heads together. It does not take long and your hands smell great. (I wear gloves). It is a great thing for visitors to do and then let them buy it from you. (By the bag)

If I sell bunches at a local market (in a cellophane bag) what price range would be appropriate for a handful sized bunch?

Check around you...depending on colour and the look of the bunch. Is it a nice colour, but without too many flowers (they look brown)? Between \$6-\$8.00 if it looks good and is a nice colour, elegantly packaged...BUT you will probably get more for the lavender when stripped. (*Lavandula x intermedia* is going for about \$48.00/kilo). Sell *Lavandula angustifolia* with a recipe attached in smaller lots (gms) Lavender for stripping needs to be picked when only 75% open. The flowers create dust and are brown when they die off. The oil is in the tiny bud that remains.

Do you use a sieve to prepare the dried lavender for potpourri?

Yes! Never sell "unclean" lavender. It seriously degrades your product. I sieve using a variety of sieves to remove larger bits, until I am only getting rid of dust.

How do you store bulk potpourri?

Lavandula x intermedia is stored in airtight bins. (Make sure you do not have any bugs that will cause harm) *Lavandula angustifolia* is stored in airtight plastic containers/bags and deep frozen for at least 10 days. It kills any bugs that will ruin your product. Do not get it wet and do NOT sell it for culinary use unless it is absolutely clean.

Dates to remember

February: 25-28: Sydney Reed Gift Fair

March 17-18: Melbourne Food Festival: Herb & Chilli Festival, Quayle Rd., Wandin VIC

May 3-5: TALG conference: Berri S.A.

From the editor

Thanks to my "out and about" correspondents. For the other members, we would love to hear from you, so please let us know about your harvest and what you have to sell. We love stories that bring joy and welcome stories that will give support to others.

Please report your successful advertising strategies and if you have a “harvest trail” in your region. Tell us about it, so that we can visit you on-line. Simply email judith@lavenderatlaggan.com.au so that we can advise our members.

If you know anyone who is interested in lavender, please tell them about the conference, their ability to be part of our “Trail” brochure and what a great team we are. TALGA members share their secrets openly.

Please consider the conference at Berri. It has been too long since we have last seen many of you. We have tried desperately to consider costs and this time we are operating on a shoestring. I am negotiating with a several excellent presenters, but need confirmation. Also we need some input on changes regarding membership and the introduction of some new ideas.

Bridestowe Lavender Estate has an excellent e-news letter about all of the happening and events on-site. It is free to join and you should take advantage of their salesmanship. I recommend that you take a look because they are our most impressive lavender farm. This year they have welcomed visitors from every part of the globe and they came by “bus, car, Helicopter, bike, taxi and on foot”, so it is a credit to them that they achieve such notoriety.

Judith Basile