

# commercial feedback

Commercial update from Neutrog #6

- Don Ruggiero's secrets
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- Seamungus results

swanport harvest



# Swanport Harvest

As for many people living on the land, farming is in the blood for Don Ruggiero. His parents Charlie and Maria emigrated from Italy in 1956, and commenced farming in Murray Bridge in 1960.

Initially, Charlie grew a variety of crops including onions and lettuce, but when Don took over the business in the mid 80's, he saw the need to be more specialised, predominately growing onions, with lettuce as a secondary crop. These days Don has turned the tables, with his main crop now being lettuce on the 250 acres in Murray Bridge, as well as having another 3 licensed growers elsewhere, adding another 300 acres to the business.

Seven years ago Don introduced the first vacuum-cooled wrapped lettuce to the Australian market under the brand name of Swanport Harvest "Staycrisp", and his success continues today as the number one producer of wrapped lettuce in Australia. "The first 3 to 4 years were

really hard going, as we found it difficult to establish a premium product in what is a commodity market" Don said. Extended shelf life and minimised product shrinkage is a requirement for both the retailer and the consumer, and as Don's vacuum-cooled wrapped lettuce caters to both of these needs, he now successfully supplies to the South Australian and Northern Territory markets through Woolworths, Foodland, IGA and many independent stores.

Don believes that the work done in the field such as cut, grade, bagging and labelling, as well as the vacuum cooling process under controlled conditions, add value to the end product, however Don does not contribute his success to these factors alone. "I've been

using Neutrog's products as base manure for 15 years. This allows me to farm the lettuce all year round as a double crop, which replaces the conventional method of growing a cover crop between plantings".

Situated on the banks of the Murray River with the rich soils and climatic conditions, Swanport is one of the few places in Australia where lettuce can be grown all year round. "We plant 52 weeks a year, and to do this we need to be sure that the soils are kept in a condition that maintains our yield, without the threat of disease and other issues" Don said. "Using Rapid Raiser banded between rows certainly gives us that extra substance we need, especially in the sandier soils."

Rapid Raiser is applied at 800kg per hectare on lettuce, while Don can put up to double that on the onions which he plants throughout June to September,

depending on variety and seasonal issues. "The need to maintain organic matter input is critical as we don't have cover crops, and having tried the raw manures and green wastes, we found them to be very labour intensive, with added concerns of introducing weeds and disease."

'The Secret is in the Bag' is a campaign which Don introduced 2 years ago to increase consumer awareness, and it has certainly paid dividends for Don. "I listened to our advertising for the first few days thinking we were missing the mark, probably because I was too close to it all, but after a few days the phone started ringing hot from other growers having a dig, and I knew we were away". Don sees the future benefits to produce a quality product that ensures buyer loyalty, but best of all enables buyers to select the name they trust every time.

# Seamungus

Very positive and encouraging results continue to flow in from growers who have used Seamungus.

Seamungus is manufactured from seaweed, fish, humic acid and manure that undergo a specially developed composting and ageing process prior to pelleting.

Whilst Seamungus contains a wide range and good levels of plant nutrients, it is perhaps the additional unique properties contained within seaweed



that provide the catalyst for providing higher yields of sustained quality.

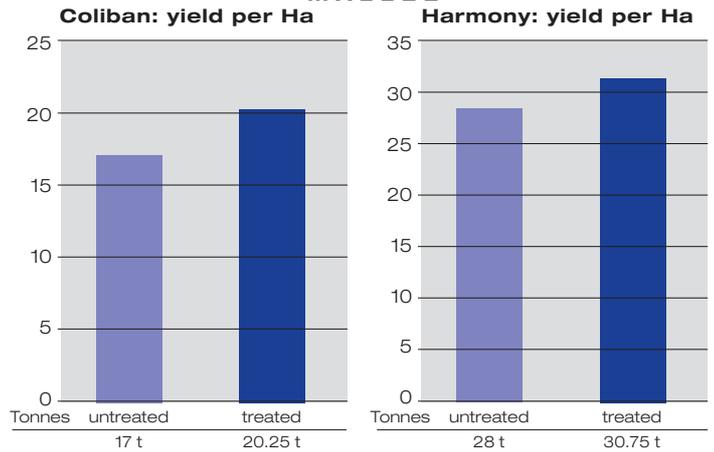
Seaweed contains a number of naturally occurring growth stimulants – fantastic for promoting plant growth and development. Seaweed is also recognised for its ability to retain moisture and increase the moisture level of the plant's cell sap – this increases the plant's ability to resist frost and heat stress.

Following the success of Seamungus on a variety of crops including potatoes (see graphs), vines and bunching vegetables, a number of controlled trials have been established in the Virginia area of South Australia.

The protocols for these trials were developed in conjunction with well-known Horticultural Consultant Vic Szabo, who has also overseen their implementation, and is monitoring the progress before reporting on the final results.

These trials are being conducted on potatoes, bunching vegetables, carrots

## MALLEE



The above trials were frost affected, and as such no pack outs was recorded. Seamungus was applied at 1t per Ha to each of the treated areas.

and almonds, and have involved the application of 1 tonne per hectare of Seamungus in addition to the growers' normal fertiliser applications.

Yields, nutrient uptake and the fruit quality will be assessed, and in addition a cost-benefit analysis will be undertaken to demonstrate the value added by a Seamungus application. Existing results have already shown the ability of Seamungus to improve yields whilst maintaining fruit quality, which will provide the opportunity to build on this data.

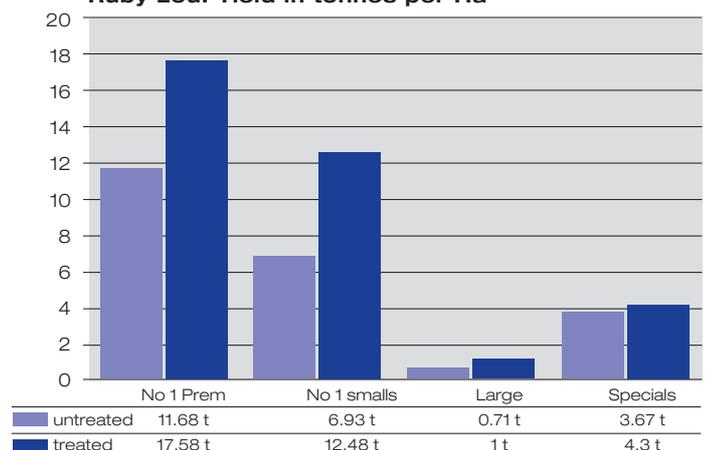
Trial results on the potatoes and bunching vegetables should be available by mid January, and the carrots and almonds early in February. Vic Szabo comments "To date the visual indications have been very positive with higher yields looking likely on the treated areas of all crops. The most telling factor to date was seen in the potato crop, whereby the heat stress caused most of the untreated tops to go to seed, whereas on the Seamungus treated area they remained in peak condition – I am looking forward to seeing the final results".

## SWAN REACH

Ruby Lou: Return in \$ per Ha



Ruby Lou: Yield in tonnes per Ha



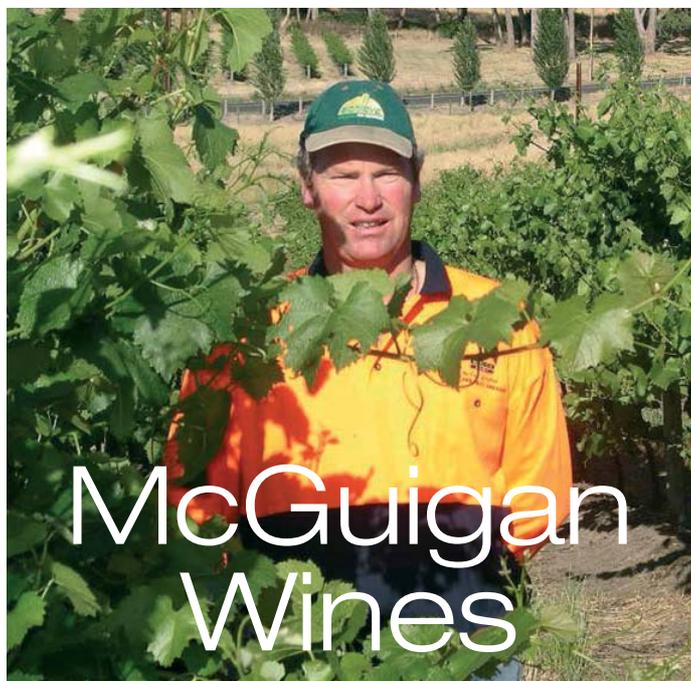
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The McGuigan family have been winegrowers for four generations, and now through McGuigan Wines have the second largest holdings in Australia.

McGuigan Wines have access to many premium wine growing areas in the country, as well as 5 state of the art wineries. Many award-winning wines are produced, including the 2002 Yaldara Farms Shiraz – voted Australia's Best Shiraz by the London's International Wine Challenge.

One such McGuigan Vineyard is located at Lobethal in the Adelaide Hills with 77 Ha under vines, and is managed by Paul Salmon.

In past years Paul has made various organic applications to the vineyard including a recent



application of 650 tonnes of cow manure – apart from the huge labour cost and the

extended time it took to apply, Paul was disappointed to see very little positive impact from

its application, not to mention the ongoing weed problem it created.

Last year, Paul applied three Neutrog products to various areas of the McGuigan vineyard – Seamungus, Bounce Back and Rapid Raiser – 46 tonnes in total.

Apart from its ease and reduced time of application, Paul has not experienced the same issue with weeds, and most significantly has been able to visually see the positive impact these products have made. "The large canopies, dark green in colour, with large flower buds in large bunch numbers have been pleasing" Paul said.

"I am particularly happy with the positive response I have seen in the previously under-performing sandy ridge area where the Seamungus was applied"

The "Just Try It" branding by-line was introduced to reflect Neutrog's philosophy that you simply can't compare organic based fertilisers against their chemical counterparts, utilising conventional NPK methodology alone.

Neutrog's organic fertilisers not only supply a wide range of nutrients to the soil, but most importantly provide the catalyst for healthy growth by stimulating the natural processes that occur in the soil.

For those of us who have come from a traditional NPK background it is still difficult to comprehend how an organic fertiliser with such a small NPK can perform to the same level as that of a conventional chemical NPK fertiliser, whilst at the same time putting something back into the soil for the future—the only way to see this for yourself is to "Just Try It".

Over the past 12 months a number of broadacre farmers have done just that.

**Jim Bowden**, who has been on the land for over 25 years, farms 1200 acres of barley, oats, lentils and canola at Arthurton, trialed

Under Cover against MAP and Fertico. "All of the crops performed better on the whole with the application of Under Cover" Jim said. "After years of chemical application, I have now witnessed first hand the advantages of applying organic products, and I'll certainly continue to use them in the future".

Jim applied the Under Cover with a John Shearer 3 tonne air seeder, and was happy with the ease of application.

**Ian Mudge** who farms at Napperby, crops a total of 6500 acres including wheat, barley, peas and lupins, and decided to give Neutrog a try on his legumes this year.



"I noticed that the leaves were a dark green colour and were broader than normal and looked so much healthier." He believes that organic fertilisers help break down the stubble residue and release nutrients back into the soil, and he is happy that he is using a product that will benefit the soil for future generations to come.

"As poor as the season was for legumes, we were still able to gain a visual understanding of how the crop performed with nil application, versus 18:20 application versus Rapid Raiser at an equivalent cost ratio, and Rapid Raiser performed as well as the 18:20" said Ian. "We want to produce a reasonable yield from legumes to help utilise natural nitrogen fixation

for the coming crops, and in turn reduce the dependence on man-made fertilisers. Most farmers recognise the need to reduce chemical input and increase natural product inputs, and Neutrog's Rapid Raiser being pH neutral is a real bonus for us in this area where we have acidic soils of around 5.5 with very low organic levels."

Ian will continue to monitor his trials with Rapid Raiser next year, as he sees this as a long term remedy, and is not looking for another short term fix.

**Rod Hunt** farms nearby at Wandearah East – he gave Rapid Raiser and Under Cover a try on his wheat, applying Rapid Raiser at 100kg Ha, and Under Cover at 80kg Ha, against DAP at 70kg Ha, all being approximately equivalent input cost value. Rod said "The Neutrog product was slower coming out to start with but in the end the DAP appeared to be burning off, while the other still looked fresh. No doubt trying just a few tonne has some convenience issues when dealing with bulk bags compared to bulk fertiliser, but I will certainly continue using Neutrog next season, and have a closer look at using some on barley as well."