

What you said about: APAL communications, the Future Orchards 2012 Program & Your orchards

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Introduction

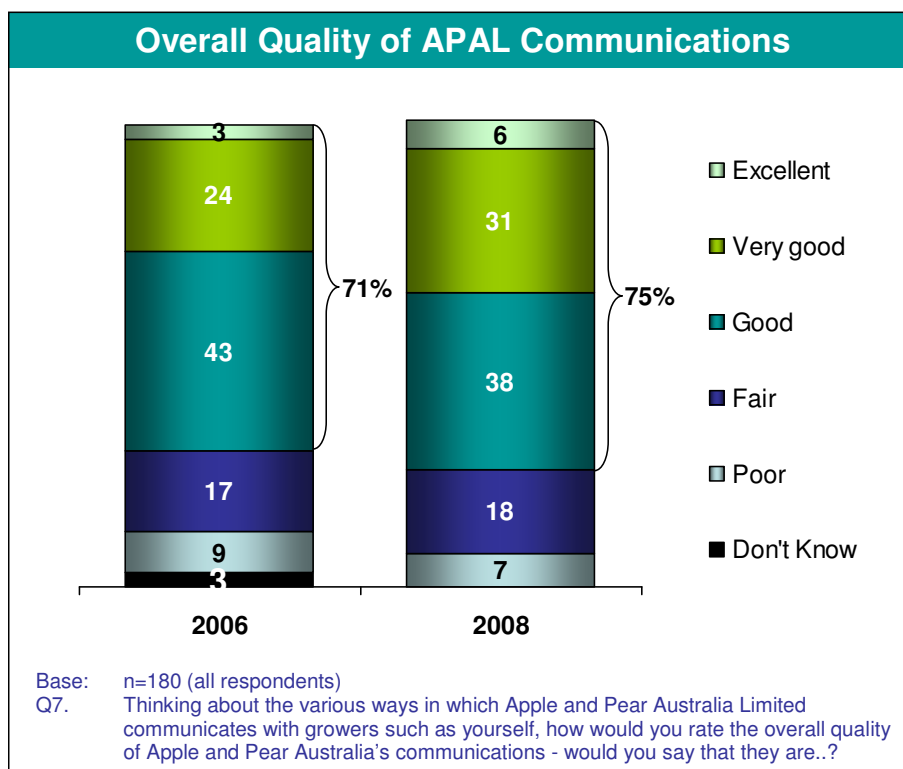
In 2008 APAL conducted a national survey of apple and pear growers to assess current industry communications, measure the effectiveness of the Future Orchards 2012 program, and gauge grower intentions. Through this survey, APAL also tracked results against a benchmark survey conducted in 2006.

Ipsos Australia, an independent research firm, undertook the survey with 180 growers in all apple and pear growing districts, assessing grower perceptions on a range of topics. This article provides an overview of the key survey findings.

About APAL communications

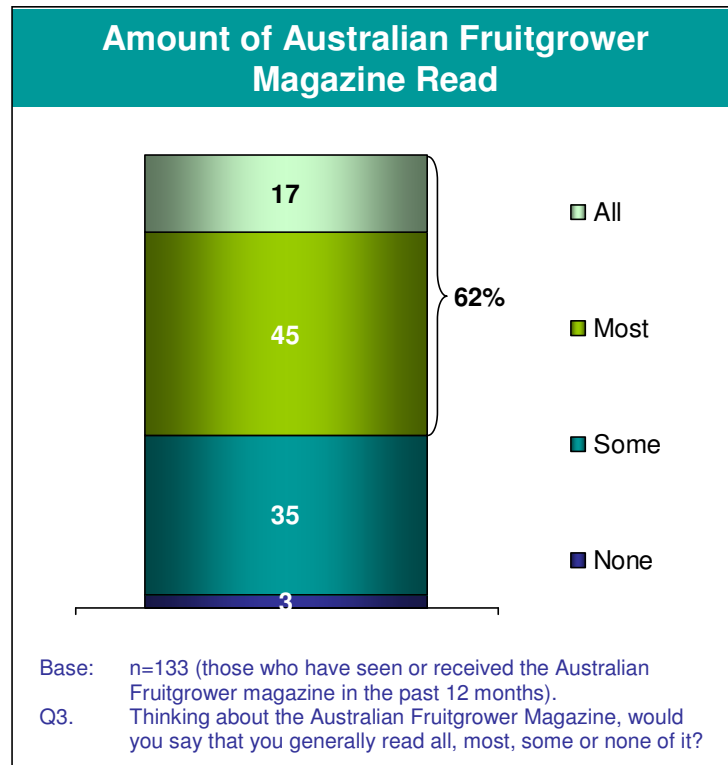
APAL Communications are rated highly

The majority of Australian apple and pear growers surveyed perceive the overall quality of APAL's communications as *good* or better (75 per cent net), which is an improvement from 2006 (at 71 per cent). This is further supported by the fact that nearly half of those surveyed believe that the overall quality of APAL communications has improved in the last two years (47 per cent).



Encouragingly, nearly three quarters of growers surveyed are aware of the Australian Fruitgrower magazine (73 per cent), with one in three spontaneously mentioning it as an industry communication they had seen or received in the past 12 months. Amongst those aware of the magazine, a significant 62 per cent read *most* or *all* of it.

Overall, Australian Fruitgrower is rated highly, although some feel the level of detail, usefulness of information and technical information could be improved. These findings confirm the importance of further enhancing the usefulness of the publication to ensure that it continues to enjoy high levels of popularity and readership among apple and pear growers.



APAL's website still under utilised

The majority of growers now have internet access (85 per cent) and significantly more have a broadband connection (57 per cent versus 34 per cent in 2006). Despite this, a slightly smaller proportion of growers reported having visited the site compared with 2006 (at 34 per cent, down from 38 per cent in 2006). Given that APAL's website is now more accessible to growers, Ipsos recommended promoting it more widely as an important source of industry information.

Positively, ratings of the website's overall usefulness have increased significantly in 2008, suggesting that improvements undertaken by APAL have been effective – however, continuous enhancements are needed to improve grower uptake and satisfaction with the website.

Future Orchards 2012 Program

The program has been a huge success

The program has been very well received, with a range of successes ranging from awareness, to participation, to outcomes and perceptions.

Almost all growers (95 per cent) had heard of the Future Orchards 2012 program, which is much higher than prior to the commencement of the program (56 per cent).

Just over half (53 per cent) of growers attended at least one field day or orchard walk, with a significant one in five (20 per cent) having attended five or more. The main reason for growers not attending an orchard walk was being too busy (40 per cent), while nearly one in five felt that the orchard walk was too far away (18 per cent).

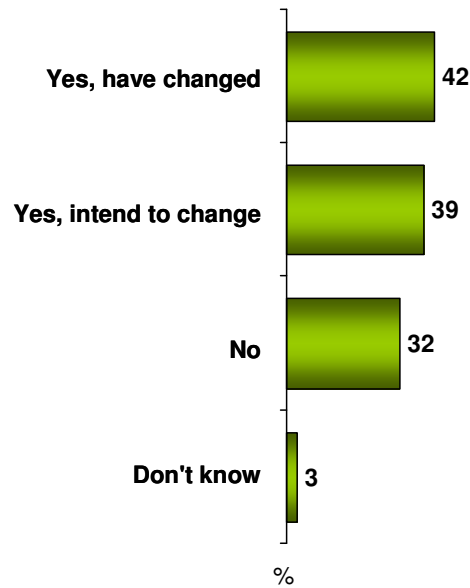
After attending the Future Orchards 2012 orchard walks, 91 per cent of attendees agreed that their industry knowledge had increased, and more than three quarters (77 per cent) agreed that they had a clearer idea of where to go with their orchard. Most growers also rated the quality of consultants and presenters as *excellent* or *very good* (79 per cent).

The key things that growers learnt or found of value from the program related to planting densities and tree management, new growing techniques, pruning methods and tree training.

The program has been effective in motivating changes to orchard practices

Importantly, two thirds (64 per cent) of growers who had participated in Future Orchards 2012 have changed and/or intend to change their orchard practices as a result of attending the walks. This finding indicates that the program has been effective in motivating the majority of growers to develop their orchards.

Change Behaviour After Attending Future Orchards 2012

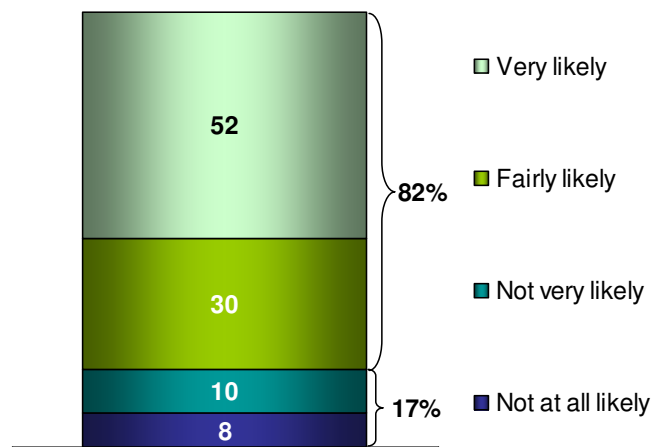


Base: n=90 (those who attended any Future Orchards 2012 field days or orchard walks)
 Q34. Have you changed or do you intend to change any orchard practices as a result of attending the Future Orchards 2012 Walks?

Bright future ahead for the program

Of all growers nationally, the majority (82 per cent) reported that they were likely to attend *future* field days or orchard walks, provided they are held at a convenient time and location. This means that the program is a salient and relevant concept for growers and should be continued into the future.

Likelihood of Attending Future Field Days or Orchard Walks



Base: n=180 (all respondents)
 Q42. How likely do you think it is that you would attend any future field days or orchard walks, provided they are held at a convenient time and location? Would you say...?

Topics growers would like to see covered in the future program relate to new varieties and root stocks, marketing, strategies to reduce costs and increase profitability, pest and disease control, and water management and irrigation.

Australia's global competitiveness

More than a third believe the Australian industry is below international standards

Although slightly better than in 2006, more than a third of growers still believe Australia's global competitiveness to be below average. APAL will continue working within the industry to address this concern over time.

Interestingly, when asked to think about their own orchard, most see themselves as about average or above in terms of orchard development and production, relative to the Australian market.

Future orchards plans

Growers are putting in higher density plantings

Similar to 2006, a third of growers (33 per cent) currently have plantings at densities of 2500+ trees per hectare, representing 12 per cent of their total orchard on average. However, those who have planted new trees or replanted part of their existing orchard in the last two years (62 per cent of growers) tend to have much more of their orchard planted at this density (31 per cent on average). This means that growers are now putting in higher density plantings when replanting or expanding their orchards, which could be attributed to the Future Orchards 2012 program.

Many growers still have plantings at a density of less than 1000 trees per hectare (67 per cent).

Density Range for Orchard in Total	Currently Have Plantings at this Density %	Average Proportion of Orchard at this Density %
At or greater than 2500 trees a hectare	33	12
1500 to 2499 trees a hectare	42	16
1000 to 1499 trees a hectare	48	25
Less than 1000 trees a hectare	67	46

Base: n=180 (all respondents).

Q14. Regarding your orchard, roughly what proportion of your orchard is planted at...?

More growers are planning to replant in the next two years than in 2006

Compared to 2006, a significantly higher proportion of growers are now planning to replant in the next two years (72 per cent versus 57 per cent in 2006).

The majority of growers planning to replant a proportion of their orchard intend on replanting at 1500+ trees per hectare. The average density for planned replanting is 1862 trees per hectare, which is similar to the 2006 survey (at 1877 trees/Ha). Growers who participated in the Future Orchards 2012 program are planning higher density replanting and new plantings than non-participants (an average of 2105 trees/Ha versus an average of 1586 trees/Ha), which should be considered a positive influence of the program.

The majority of growers plan on remaining in the industry

Nearly seven in ten growers plan on remaining in the industry (68 per cent), compared to just over one in five (22 per cent) who plan to leave within 5 years.

Almost two thirds plan on developing their orchard, which is in line with the 2006 survey.

Survey details

These findings are based on the 2008 Apple and Pear grower survey, which involved 180 Computer Aided Telephone Interviews, conducted between April 7 and April 22 2008. Random sampling was used, from a list of growers provided by APAL,

The interviews took 18 minutes on average. In order to take part in the interview growers were screened to ensure that more than 50 per cent of their orchard production was dedicated to apples and/or pears.

The data was weighted to reflect the actual proportion of growers in each State. In total, approximately 16 per cent of apple and pear growers nationally participated in the research, which means the results should be considered quite representative of the views of growers across the country.

This research was conducted by the Sustainable Communities and Environment Unit of Ipsos Australia.