

GAETHAN LAYS DOWN THE LAW ON COSTS

Stricter emphasis on quality control and staff accountability have helped Gaethan Cutri prepare his fruit farm for better times.

LIKE any fruit grower, there are several important aspects of his business that Gaethan Cutri cannot control.

However, since returning to the family fruit farm at Woorinen, near Swan Hill, Victoria, nearly four years ago, he has concentrated on those aspects that he can.

Gaethan was practising law before making a decision to return with his wife Nicole to the family fruit farm owned by his parents, Dom and Connie.

"Since I've been back, the Australian dollar rose, the Taiwan market closed, there has been massive overproduction, the grey channel to China got greyer, and our cost of production has steadily risen," Gaethan said.

The Cutris' cost of production has been influenced by rising fertiliser and chemical costs and a change from State to Federal pay structure, which lifted wages 30 percent.

The AFFCO member said he and Nicole worked on the business, rather than in the business, and a major restructure had trimmed all fat from the operation.

"If prices go up 20 cents a kilogram we'll be rubbing our hands together," Gaethan said.

Cutri Fruit grows 170 hectares of peaches, plums, nectarines and apricots, with the capacity to plant a further 90ha, at their Woorinen property.

One of Gaethan's business focuses when he returned to the family business was to improve



by
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quality and reduce rejection rates, and this has become even more important in the face of falling prices and rising costs.

"We worked out what our biggest threats were and worked hard to eliminate them," he said.

For example, thrip was causing huge losses, so Gaethan intro-

duced quality control systems to eliminate marked fruit and placed renewed emphasis on accountability of employees.

Fruit is now sent no later than four days from when it was picked, and checked three times before it is sent.

"We have reduced the rejection of fruit to almost zero," Gaethan said.

"I think we might have had

one rejection for the whole year."

Cutri Fruit has also improved the consistency of its seconds line to raise the average price per kilogram, and Gaethan believes their marketing program – including a new logo, packaging and website – has helped them develop the niche markets necessary to help offset the loss of their previous biggest market in Taiwan.

He said this focus on areas of the business they could control had put them in an excellent position for when both the season and prices were more favourable.

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