

President's Message, September 2011

I have just finished writing this column as I have been advised of the death of a dear and valued friend and pioneer of the industry, Frans Buijsrogge. I will keep my column the same and I speak positively on many matters despite a real sadness from that loss but Frans would not have wanted me to do otherwise: - *Jim Grierson*.

Since my last communication our European growers have been very busy harvesting. Unfortunately for most the harvest output has been well under previous years. As predicted at the Goes conference the harvest has finished around the 92,000 t. We are of course seen to be in a commodity market therefore supply and demand have a great influence on what prices are finally agreed between buyers and sellers. Prices for fruit at the farm gate have varied from $\hat{a}, -0.95\text{c/kg}$ thru $\hat{a}, -1.50/\text{kg}$ with fruit concentrate being as high as $\hat{a}, -8.40/\text{kg}$ down to $\hat{a}, -6.20/\text{kg}$. This is almost twice the price from previous years. Although a major factor in this increase is the shortfall in production, there is also increasing demand from buyers who are interested in the health research that is becoming available. While supply might come more into line with normal market demand in the future the increasing interest from a range of buyers should see prices closer to what growers require in the future.

As we have been saying for several years now, the challenge for the Blackcurrant industry as a whole is to de-commoditize the Blackcurrant: as it has some of the most compelling human scientific research to support many sound health claims. From my own experience in the industry over the last 30 years there isn't a better time for our industry to reposition itself in the global market. We have all the elements in place: increased demand as consumers start to understand the real health value of the blackcurrant; increased interest in new product development opportunities by both existing and new crop buyers; and most importantly, a new spirit of cooperation between our producer countries to grow the "global demand-pie" and then compete through innovation and agronomic excellence to capture their own share of that increase.

The UK Foundation will host our forthcoming 3rd International Blackcurrant

Conference to be held in Dundee in association with the James Hutton Institute. Jonathan Snape and his team are putting together a very interesting programme for this conference. Mark your diaries for the 15th thru 18th May 2012: you will want to be there!

As a fore runner to this conference, the IBA are running two forums: "Marketing: the new 'futures' for Brands and Processors' and the 'Agronomy: growing for the new futures'... The chairman Svend Jensen and Rob Saunders respectively are working on an agenda with the IBA executive for each forum and we will have details out to you later in the year. As research teams increasingly discover new health attributes for blackcurrants it's important that we as the industry's global 'representative' don't misrepresent those attributes to the market. You'll see that on our website we now make an important declaration regarding how such science results should be used: research is only relevant to the blackcurrant product used for the trials: different cultivars, different growing conditions, different processing techniques, all change the phytochemical dynamics of the finished product.

Scientists still don't know exactly why some blackcurrant formulations achieve some specific health values and we mustn't allow investment by some companies in research and product development to be "watered down" by consumers assuming the results of specific research necessarily relate to any and all blackcurrants. If it happens then no one will invest in such research. And more importantly, if it happens then consumers expecting some physiological value from taking any blackcurrant product could be disappointed. Your executive has been made aware (under confidentiality) of some very exciting developments in new areas of health and lifestyle research and product development. As these initiatives become public and are coupled with the already high-profile research being done in institutions in the UK, USA, Japan, New Zealand, Finland, and France, we can expect a renaissance of the blackcurrant as one of the most respected and desired natural fruits for human health and well-being.

Each year the catchphrase agreed at our inaugural Conference in Christchurch New Zealand in 2008 become less and less futuristic aspirational and more a proven reality for here and now: Blackcurrant - The best berry for life

Jim Grierson, IBA President, June 2011