



---

## **Frank is scoring runs on the board at Brick Creek**

Frank Grant was born on a banana farm at Coffs Harbour and reckons he has banana sap for blood.

The Farm Manager of the 50 ha Brick Creek banana plantation near Tully, Frank has used his 30-year background in banana growing to good advantage, achieving production improvements of 25% last year.

Frank has worked at the Hawkins Road Transport-owned plantation for the past five years, attracted to North Queensland by better prospects for banana production.

The Hawkins Road Transport company is primarily a banana transporting company which bought the plantation eight years ago to ensure its trucks were never half empty on trips south to markets in Melbourne.

However, at a yield of close to 3,000 cartons per hectare (1,200 cartons per acre), the Brick Creek plantation these days is filling trucks by itself.

Since 2003, the plantation has been running under the Freshcare on-farm food safety program to assure quality standards are met.

Freshcare works on independently audited HACCP principles and is 'easy and straight forward to use', says Frank.

"Freshcare lets us track our chemicals from season to season. We are saving money by not using more than we need to, increasing production by knowing what works and meeting environmental standards required by the community."

Frank Grant says production has increased thanks largely to better spray products on the market for treating fungal diseases effectively without affecting quality or yield.

He refutes the current theory that if you increase calcium and magnesium rates in your soil you don't need to spray because your plants will be able to resist fungal attack.

"Leaf spraying is the key issue. Fungal spores do not just select sick trees. You must have a protectant on the leaves of all your trees. It's like using sun screen. You've got to put it on to get the benefit. The more healthy leaves you've got the bigger the bunches and the better quality the fruit."

Frank Grant says that if everyone got behind a district spraying program, disease levels would come down and everybody's production would benefit.

"We've got to remember the lessons from the black sigatoka outbreak in 2001 and treat the problem district-wide. People think they can skip spraying but you've got to spend money to make money in this business."

Previous spray practices where protectant fungicides were used with high rates of mineral oil resulted in leaf burn and interfered with photosynthesis, producing lack lustre crops.

But 18 months ago, Frank switched to Penncozeb 420SC, a fine particle mancozeb product with a nil withholding period distributed by Nufarm.

"Penncozeb 420SC gives us better leaf coverage for a lot less oil. We're getting good fungi protection without burning leaves or new fruit."

---



Frank says increased production will come from further improving the pH of the soil. Frank limes four times a year at 1.2 tonnes per hectare (half a tonne per acre).

He has also investigated boosting soil microbes in the soil in other ways.

Three years ago, Frank switched from trickle irrigation to mini sprinklers spraying 40 litres per hour under his trees.

“Banana trees are surface root feeders and adequate moisture under the trees creates the right environment for their health. Water is a good tool to increase production.

“Mini sprinklers also allow us to water in our fertilizer without any run-off problems.”

Frank Grant said that Tully’s dry seasons of late had been an issue in maintaining quality.

“Under the dry conditions, the flower end of the banana grows hard and dry and tends to mark the bunches.

“Because we pick green it is impossible to see the damage done until after the fruit is treated at market.”

Frank puts the level of fruit damage at about 20% per bunch but he has worked out how to eliminate the problem which occurs when transporting the bunches from the paddock to the shed.

Frank is understandably tight lipped about the details but two systems will come on stream next year.

Clearly, Frank Grant is someone worth watching in future years!

ENDS

**CONTACT:**

Frank Grant  
Brick Creek Farm Manager  
Telephone: (07) 4066 7542

Guy Perriman  
Horticulture Product Manager – Nufarm  
Telephone: (07) 3893 8777

Chris Walker  
Write Action Communications  
Telephone: 0418 716 772

Words: 671

Approval  
Frank Grant 28/10/04  
Eddie Hayes  
Guy Perriman 27/10/04

– END –

---