

Tumut and Adelong Times

AND BATLOW DISTRICT NEWS

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• Revolutionary nitrogen-blanketed technology introduced State of the art apple juice plant for Batlow

A \$500,000 project about to be undertaken in Batlow using world-leading technology is expected to be producing the finest quality apple juice in Australia within four months.

In what will be greeted with open arms, particularly given the disastrous season for apples last year, Bob and Janelle Heatley, directors of Mount Selwyn Snowfield P/L, (the operator of Mayday Orchards in Batlow), have announced the establishment of "Batlow Premium Juices."

The company is to install a state of the art automated inert gas blanketed fruit juicing plant on Guevgeli Orchard, Heatley's Road in Batlow.

The technology of the plant will be the first of its type in the southern hemisphere, being the only plant in Australasia capable of producing pure un-oxidised fruit juice.

The quality of the fresh single strength apple juice the factory will be capable of producing has already won the company an exclusive supply contract with a leading metropolitan marketer of high quality pure fruit juice products.

The anticipated volume is expected to approach a million litres per year of blended apple juice, including variety specific juices such as Pink Lady, equating to some 3,600 bins of juice fruit per year.

And given that there have been approaches relating to any surplus production, a potential output of well over two million litres annually is being projected longer term.

The project received a major fillip this week with the announcement that the project to install the hi-tech juice-processing equipment to produce high quality pure apple juice from locally grown fruit is to receive \$150,000 in funding from the federal government under the Food Processing in Regional Australia Program (FPRAP).

It was one of nineteen regional food processing ventures nationally to share in \$2 million in the latest FPRAP funding round aimed at encouraging value-adding before produce leaves rural and regional areas, strengthening local infrastructure and support networks.

"We are confident the quality of the plant coupled to Batlow's famous-for-flavour apples gives our company the potential to produce the finest quality apple juice in Australia," Bob Heatley told the *Times*.

"It is an exciting project that will further enhance the profile of Batlow Apples as well as importantly providing local orchardists with a reliable guaranteed pre-



Bob Heatley of Mayday Orchards, Batlow, pictured with an earlier version of the type of equipment being purchased in order to produce the finest quality apple juice in Australia. Using inert gas to eliminate any oxidation, the equipment is due for commissioning in September. The plant is expected to prove a boon for orchardists in protecting them from scenarios such as last year when major hail damage wiped out up to 80% of crops.

mium price for the juice apples," he said.

"After experiencing the worst year on record for our orchards as a result of extensive hail damage, coupled to an oversupplied market, and with next to no processing options, we began researching alternatives to ensure our orchards were protected from large losses that can occur in scenarios like 2005.

"We concluded that having a stable processing factory for the damaged fruit would allow us to modify our growing technique in orchard blocks that experience damage, allowing full growing cost recovery instead of experiencing large losses as local orchardists did last year."

NEW CONCEPT

The Heatley's research led them to Viniquip International and after a study tour to New Zealand where they saw some earlier versions (without nitrogen) and extensive discussions with Viniquip, the idea of inert gas pressing of apples surfaced.

"The process has been used with enormous success in the wine industry in Europe since its development over the past year, however building an apple press with this technology was a new concept" explained Mr Heatley.

"Viniquip commissioned the French/Swiss company Bucher to build the world's first pneumatic nitrogen blanketed rotary apple press.

"This press will be arriving in Batlow next month for commissioning in September by French technicians."

He said the press would not be limited to apples, and was so versatile it could also press juice from grapes, carrots, spinach, blueberries etc, all without exposing the product to the atmosphere, preventing oxidation of the juice that destroys many of the qualities of fruit juices.

"Besides our initial contract we have already had other parties interested in obtaining juice product from this press, and this has all happened within forty

eight hours of the Minister's announcement of the grant for the Batlow facility," he said.

"In its initial configuration, working five days per week, the plant can process 80% of Batlow's normal fruit production. This equates to some 2,500,000 litres per year of premium apple juice.

"We will finally have viable options when our crops experience damage or if market conditions become extremely poor for damaged fruit, as was the case in 2005.

"The juice factory will do for our orchards what snowmaking has done for Selwyn Snowfields, that is ensure long term sustainable trading by eliminating external risks."

Mr Heatley paid tribute for the level of support the company had received from the Tumut Shire Council and the Department of Agriculture District Horticulturalist in obtaining the government grant for the project.

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