

Supplies shrink, so prices rise

By Peter Lamb

SUNBEAM Foods has confirmed previous indicative prices for dried sultanas and sunmuscat grapes and increased its offer for currants by \$165 to \$1615 a tonne.

More than 200 grower-suppliers attended Sunbeam's pre-harvest meeting at Mildura Golf Club yesterday where they were told they'd be paid for their fruit up to 20 days earlier, and that all 2008, fruit deliveries would go direct to the Irnyple processing site at no additional cost.

The company also briefed growers about other initiatives to increase fruit intake and moisture measuring efficiencies.

"Due to continuing firming in European market prices, the price of currants has risen from the price we advised in November," Sunbeam Supply and Processing general manager, Chris Ellis said.

"The price to contracted growers for 4 Crown currants is now \$1615, a rise of \$265 on the price paid last harvest.



Chris Ellis

strengthening of global prices since the completion of the 2007, northern hemisphere crops."

He said the company was still confident the season would yield about 10,000 tonnes of dried vine fruit.

He said the impact of rain last weekend on fruit quality was difficult to estimate.

"Growers have suggested the damage is patchy and not a positive," he said.

"They're still saying they can get high grades, if the weather remains favourable."

He said growers were disappointed the short-

age of irrigation water this season had prevented them getting a big crop and capitalising on high dried fruit prices, which have come despite a high Australian dollar.

Sunbeam would also like more fruit.

"In fact, we'd have been happy to get 25,000 to 30,000 tonnes," he said.

Sunbeam chief operating officer Richard Findlay acknowledged the difficulties growers were experiencing with the drought, recent heat and rain.

"Sunbeam remains committed to not only purchasing and promoting Australian dried fruit, but also to its manufacturing base in Sunraysia," he said.

"We continue to heavily promote the Sunbeam brand, and see its continuing success as crucial to all our suppliers."

Mr Findlay said following discussions with the Australian Dried Fruits Association, Sunbeam would make the first payment for fruit up to 20 days faster.

"Sunbeam will pay 10 days following the end of the month of delivery," he said.

Australian Dried Fruits Association chairman Peter Jones welcomed the change.

"This means that growers will receive their door payments within 10 to 41 days maximum, instead of having to wait up to 60 days following delivery of fruit," Mr Jones said.

"Grower members of the ADFA board have felt strongly about this matter for the past two years, and again recently, requested Sunbeam to review payment arrangements with the aim of reducing the door payment period."

In 2006, Sunbeam Foods made a number of significant changes to grower payment schedules including the introduction of five separate tranches, with the first being 30 days after the end of the month of delivery and comprising 40 per cent of the total, followed by four amounts of 15 per cent in July, September, November and February.