

# Tips for a top fruit crop

Robyn Ainsworth 16 Nov 2018, 12:30 p.m.



**SHE'S APPLES:** Fiona Hall, in the sorting shed with apples, has plenty of advice for novice tree crop growers. PHOTOS: Robyn Ainsworth

Apple and cherry grower Fiona Hall, Caernarvon, Orange, NSW, has plenty of advice for would-be cherry orchardists.

"It's a risky game – you've got to be able to manage the risk to the best you can," she said. "Hail netting is like your crop insurance."

Fiona said 90 per cent of the orchards were netted. While birds can be a problem, flying foxes are the real pests.

Fiona said there was usually a hail net subsidy available.

A major risk for cherries is rain when the fruit is setting.

"If we get rain, we get a helicopter in to try and dry them."

She advises people to stick to where their skills lie, not trying to do everything.

"That's why we pack for a lot of growers who are really good growers, and it's hard to be everything – to be the marketer, to be the sales, to be the logistics, to be the exporter, so I guess that's why we've got a good team."

Growers should be prepared for letdowns.

"You've got to be growing the right crops in the right districts," she said. "If you are going to try in hot climates the risk is you may not get the yield. Not every year you'll get a crop."

The Halls' Bonny Glen Fruits business on Caernarvon is between 1000 and 1100 metres above sea level with rich volcanic-origin, deep basalt-based soil.

However, due to the elevation the orchards are prone to excessive rain and some snow and frost.

"It's five years before you get a crop with tree crops. It's a big investment (besides the cost of land)," she said.

"Firstly you've got to develop the land and select the right varieties and have crop protection. It's not for the faint-hearted."

That's why the Halls diversified into apples as well as cherries.

"Networking is also really important, to understand what's happening in the industry from government policy to consumer trends, to know what variety to plant..."

"We exhibit at a lot of international events ... and that's where we catch

up with a lot of customers and promote the brand."

Fiona advised new growers to look to industry bodies and conferences, such as Hort Innovation, AusVeg, Apple and Pear Australia Ltd (APAL), and the Cherry Growers Association.