



MYWORKING LIFE

By TRACEY PRISK

FORMING professional alliances with other orchardists is the way of the future according to Ken Perry who, in recent years, has formed business partnerships with people he once would have considered competitors.

"I don't know if there will be many family farms in the future;

there will be more and more corporate farms," he said.

"(Increasingly) it comes back to economics."

Mr Perry, who grows predominantly cherries, recently signed a deal with another orchardist in Young to share a grader and cut costs by picking fruit at different times.

He's also working with orchardists in Tasmania and Victoria

to release a new variety of cherries that are harvested late in the season.

To date the orchardists have worked together to licence the Canadian variety and import the cuttings to grow here for sale to the international market.

The "big, black cherry" grows larger than a 20 cent piece but is

deemed too expensive for domestic consumers.

"We'll sell them where the money is; Australia just won't pay the money for big cherries," Mr Perry said.

Mr Perry said over the years he had also come to value the networking opportunities offered by organisations such as the Australian Fresh Fruit Company.

"A lot of the major growers are members and we talk and share ideas," he said. "We can no longer afford to keep secrets."

Mr Perry has worked on his family's Sunnycrest orchard for 29 years, following in the footsteps of his father who, although in his 80s, still takes an active interest in the property.

He realises, however, that the family's orchard dynasty may soon come to an end

FINGER PICKIN'

if his sons, who are in their 20s, decide to make a life for themselves away from the land.

"They're both working in their own trades so it will be interesting to see what will happen in the next five years," he said.

"If they decide not to take over then it's the end (and) I don't want that to happen."

Mr Perry and his wife Anne have already started to plan for their future, although at the moment their primary concern is getting through this year's cherry picking season.

"We're got around 100 seasonal workers at the moment," he said.

While many of the pickers are from overseas there are still plenty of grey nomads keen to work their way around the country.

"We take people from any age group and many of them are using this as a way to see Australia while they work."



FINGER PICKING GOOD: Ken Perry sees professional alliances as the way of the future. Photo: STEVE GOSCH

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