Challenges of Organic Top Fruit Production or Things I’d do differently

Martin Soble, Whitethorn Farm
Background – Carey Organic

- 70 acre fruit and veg
- 6 acres soft fruit - outdoor
- 18 acres top and stone fruit

Location
- Typical 600mm/annum rain
- Fairly sheltered, sloping, Sandy Clay Loam

Established 2005
Outlets

- National Wholesalers
- Major box schemes
- Local retail & catering outlets
Orchards

- 9 acres Dessert & Culinary apples
- 3 Acres Cider apples
- 2.6 acres Pears
- 1.5 acres Plums
- 2 acres Cherries
Better Varietal Choice

- Choose more carefully
  - P&D susceptibility – plums/cherries easier?
  - Marketability – size/colour/cookers
  - Harvest issues – bruising, cracking, dropping, splitting
  - Harvest timing – more earlies

- Top work wrong varieties
Don’t believe the rootstock chart!
• Top variety makes as much difference
Rootstocks & Spacing

- Don’t believe the rootstock chart!
  - Top variety makes as much difference

- Choose spacing to suit variety
  - Have inter-planted many varieties
Prune harder and earlier!
  • “Farming light and air”

Adopt commercial pruning approach
  • 3 or 4 big cuts a year

Manage Height better
  • P&D control
  • Harvest
  • Stability
Fruit Thinning

- Thin more
  - It’s worth the time and expense
- Larger Fruits
- Better quality Fruits
- Less tree damage
Walk the orchards more regularly

- Carry a crop walker’s guide
- Make notes and take photo’s
- Get agronomist help
Better P&D Management

- Keep on top of pests and disease
- Avoid build up
- Use monitoring traps
- Prioritise preventative activities
- Remove susceptible varieties
Records

- Key dates
- Bud Progress
- Crop size
- Varietal differences
- P&D
Better ground management

- Cultivation of strip
- Mulching
- Don’t mow alleyways often