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Fingers crossed for a bumper harvest

HERE'S HOPING: Macadamia grower, Pam Woods, is looking forward to a good season ahead, with the macadamia trees now in full bloom.
Picture: MIREILLE MERLET-SHAW

Macca farmers hoping for fine weather as trees start to flower

By MEL MCMILLAN
Rural reporter

PAM WOODS, of Lindendale, is trying not to get her hopes up.

This year, flowering of her 16,000 macadamia trees is looking good, but it was the same story last year before too much rain washed away any chance of a bumper crop.

Heavy rainfall after flowering reduced nut set on Mrs Woods' three macadamia farms at Lindendale, Dunoon and Corindi, by as much as 50%.

Many other growers also experienced big losses.

Across the region, macadamias are beginning to bloom with their distinctive yellow flowers, but as all farmers know Mother Nature doesn't always cooperate and the road between flowering and harvest can be a long one.

"Last year it was just devastating for the industry," Mrs Woods said.

"We haven't really had a good year since 2006."

For many growers the strain of poor sea-

son upon poor season is proving too much and many Northern Rivers macadamia farms have been put on the market.

The farmers doing it the toughest are those who borrowed money to gear up production to meet strong demand for the nut, Mrs Woods said.

And while the demand remains strong and the price holds firm, farmers have been unable to capitalise on the market with big shortfalls in expected outputs over several years.

Despite the challenges, Mrs Woods said she wouldn't be quitting the farming life anytime soon and her fingers are firmly crossed that next year's harvest will be a good one.

Mrs Woods and her husband, Brian Alcorn, moved to the area from Sydney 11 years ago to become macadamia farmers, leaving behind their careers in computer consulting.

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Mediaportal Report

17/08/2011

▶ **ABC North Coast NSW (Lismore)**
Rural Report - 17/08/2011 6:44 AM
Joanne Dodgson

Dodgson explains Australia's macadamia crop could be smaller than South Africa's for the first time ever, due to untimely rainfall. Jolyon Burnett, Australian Macadamia Society says there's hope for another good flowering, and the overseas appetite for macadamias is growing. He says the crop this year is smaller than expected, but they are seeing firmer prices. Burnett says there are near record prices across the market due to strong demand from China.

Interviewees: Jolyon Burnett, Australian Macadamia Society

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Audience	
Male 16+:	N/A
Female 16+:	N/A
All People:	N/A



Growers are hoping for a bumper crop

Story: Doug Gillett

A BLANKET of healthy yellow flowers is a welcome sight for Bundaberg macadamia orchardists as they fight back from the Christmas floods.

The fragrant yellow flower has sprouted in between the leaves of local macadamias in strong numbers and the fingers of growers are crossed in anticipation of a bumper crop.

Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers chairman Geoff Chivers said trees had compensated for a poor showing last season with an above-average performance of budding blooms.

“All those nutrients that weren’t used last year are now coming to the surface and there are

high ground-moisture levels because of heavy rainfall,” he said.

“Everything is in pretty good shape at the moment.”

Nation-wide, adverse weather conditions have significantly reduced the past three macadamia crops.

Strong flowering has also been reported in the industry’s heartland of northern New South Wales, Gympie and the Sunshine Coast.

Australian Macadamia Society chief executive Jolyon Burnett said the current spread of flowers was pleasing but stressed it was important for growers to not count their kernels before they cracked.

As few as 3% of flowers were converted into nuts and only half of those reached full matur-

ity, if conditions were not favourable. Each spray of 40 to 50 flowers produced from four to 15 nutlets which ripened into nuts.

The nuts fell to the ground between March and September and were harvested at regular intervals.

“This is a promising start to spring and brings hope to growers who have been waiting for an upturn since the last big macadamia crop,” Mr Burnett said.

“The past few years have posted respectable flowerings, but the persistent rain this season, dry weather last season and the floods and storms of 2009 have put the brakes on a significant yield. This is a critical time for growers and we hope this spectacular flowering will turn into a spectacular crop.”



HIGH HOPES: Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers chairman Geoff Chivers is hopeful of a big macadamia harvest after last season’s disappointment. Scottie Simmonds