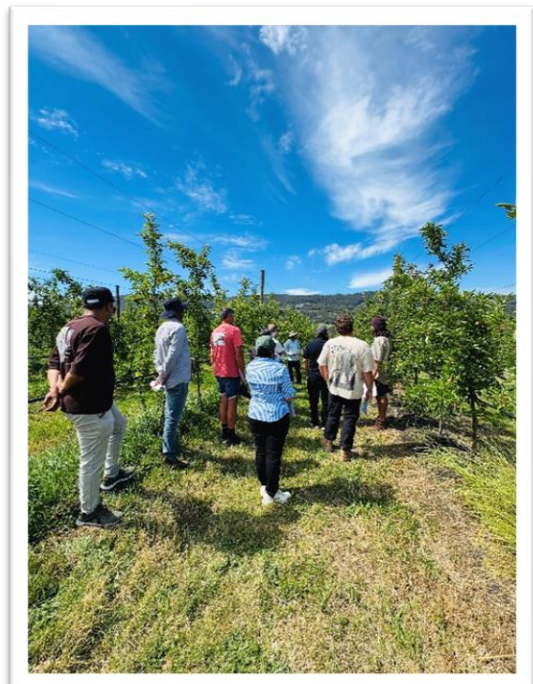


FGV Study Tour to Tasmania

As part of the funding received from the **Future Drought Fund - Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Grants Program**, FGV organized a study tour to Tasmania from Wednesday, 04 December to Saturday, 07 December 2024. The tour included visits to several innovative and high-quality apple and cherry orchards.

The first stop on the study tour was the **Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) in-line cover cropping trial site**, in Rookwood, Tasmania. The primary focus of the trial is orchard floor management aimed at improving soil health. The trial investigates how different cover crops and organic mulches impact tree physiology, fruit quality, and overall orchard sustainability.

During the tour, TIA researchers shared their findings on the role of cover crops such as legumes, grasses, and other organic mulches in enhancing soil structure, promoting microbial diversity, and improving water retention. The growers were able to observe firsthand the impact of these practices on the health of the trees and the surrounding environment. Additionally, discussions focused on how soil health correlates with fruit quality and the long-term sustainability of orchards, especially in the context of climate change and resource constraints.





In the afternoon, the group visited **Hansen Orchards**, a well-established cherry and apple grower and exporter. This orchard is known for its commitment to quality fruit production and innovative approaches to orchard management.

One of the highlights of the visit was the advanced cherry sorting and packing machine, which uses cutting-edge technology to streamline the process of sorting fruit by size, colour, and quality. This automated system helps improve efficiency and reduce labour costs while ensuring high-quality produce for the market.



Additionally, the group learned about the orchard's use of rain covers, which protect the fruit from adverse weather conditions such as heavy rain or hail. The rain covers help ensure the fruit remains in optimal condition for harvesting, minimizing the risk of damage.

The tour provided valuable insights into how Hansen Orchards maintains its competitiveness in the market while adopting new technologies to enhance both productivity and product quality.



The morning of Day 2 was spent at **R&R Smith Orchard**, where participants were introduced to organic farming practices and the operation of an organic cidery. R&R Smith is known for its commitment to sustainability and organic certification, focusing on maintaining soil health, biodiversity, and minimizing the use of synthetic chemicals. The growers were shown how these practices contribute to healthier soils, better tree vigor, and more resilient crops.



Additionally, R&R Smith operates an organic cidery, where apples grown on the farm are processed into premium organic cider.

This visit provided valuable insights into the challenges and benefits of organic

farming and how diversifying into value-added products like cider can enhance the farm's economic sustainability.



The final stop of the study tour was **Reeve Tasmania**, an orchard operation led by a young grower. Reeve Tasmania is dedicated to innovative and sustainable orchard management practices. They are using helicopters for cloud seeding to prevent intense rainfall that could lead to crop and fruit damage. The young grower shared their vision for building a successful and sustainable orchard business while facing the challenges of a changing agricultural landscape.





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