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Weather

TEMPERATURES: Thursday: minimum 10.3 degrees, maximum 31.0 degrees. Friday: 18.3, 25.8. Saturday: 11.2, 28.1. Sunday: 10.9, 26.9. Monday: 10.2.

RAINFALL: Friday, 1.2 mm. Month to date: 11 mm. Year to date: 253.4 mm. (2000 to November 17: 360 mm)

EVAPORATION: Weekly pan evaporation: 38.1 mm.

FORECAST: Today: Fine to mild, 9-23. Wednesday: Fine to mild, 10-26. Thursday: Chance of isolated showers and thunderstorms developing later. Warm ahead of late change, 12-29.

SUNRISE/SUNSET: Today: sunrise 6.08 am, sunset 8.22 pm. Wednesday: 6.08 am, 8.23 pm. Thursday: 6.08 am, 8.24 pm.

The good oil

\$40 m olive plant start

By ZOE DAVIES

The lakeside town of Boort, 40 kilometres south-west of Kerang has come one step closer to becoming the olive oil capital of Australia.

Construction of the new Timbercorp Olive olive oil processing plant in Boort officially commenced on Saturday with Victorian Treasurer, Mr John Brumby turning the first sod.

The ceremony was part of a field and family day at the olive project, located 10 kilometres west of the Boort township.

Mr Brumby described the occasion as a very important day not just for the olive project, but for the region as a whole.

"Looking around I am delighted to be surrounded by nearly half a million olive trees," Mr Brumby remarked. "It is an extraordinary achievement that has the capacity to gear up something which will represent significant investment for the region."

The new \$40 million plant will directly create 40 new local jobs and once operational in March 2003, will importantly represent the investment of more than \$110 million in the Boort region.

To date, 1450 hectares of micro-irrigated olive trees have been established at the project which is a major part of the Loddon Murray region's New Mediter-

anean horticultural industry initiative.

The initiative includes the development of regional infrastructure with the expansion of the Waranga Western irrigated channel and a new power line.

Speaking at the ceremony, Timbercorp chief executive officer, Mr Robert Hance congratulated project general manager, Mr Darren Lipton, site manager, Mr Ken McDougall and their team for their fine efforts in establishing what he described as a world class olive grove.

Mr Hance also announced that Timbercorp had signed a letter of understanding with olive oil companies, Costa d'Oro and the Braha Group to enter a joint venture for the installation and operation of the new processing facility.

"This joint venture also incorporates the value adding activities associated with olive oil through bottling, blending, branding and marketing of Australian oil to both the export and domestic markets," Mr Hance said.

The Braha Group has been owned and managed by the Braha family for three generations with the global company presently marketing more than 100,000 tonnes a year of both bulk and bottled olive oil to a customer base that includes most of the

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Phil Dalley, manager of Dalley's Nursery, at Murrabit, is one of a growing number of enterprises tapping into the region's horticultural industry.

Growing a market niche

An olive tree nursery in the heart of a traditional dairying and citrus area near Kerang is one example of the swing towards horticultural pursuits across the region.

The growing success of expanding niche industries in the Shire of Gannawarra continues to highlight the region's huge potential for horticultural development despite a traditional focus on other types of agriculture.

One of these success stories lies

in the transformation of a citrus orchard at Murrabit into a viable and rapidly expanding olive tree nursery.

Only five years ago, Phil and Karen Dalley operated a 46-hectare citrus orchard, 28 kilometres north of Kerang.

They now manage a three-hectare nursery and are responsible for the propagation of oil-producing olive trees supplied to commercial businesses across the state.

The transformation followed a decision made by the Dalleys in 1996 to move away from the industry and explore the diverse potential of horticulture in the region.

At the time, this decision to leave the citrus industry mirrored the thoughts of many citrus farmers within the district who continued to face increased difficulty obtaining high yields due to the area's heavy soil conditions. There now

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newest Home