

# Introduction

It is no secret that nuts have been a valued food since prehistoric times. Nut harvest was a time of ceremony for hunter-gatherers, and today nuts continue to be considered gourmet food. In fact, consumption of nuts and nut products is increasing and medical authorities are recommending more nuts in the diet for health reasons. This is very good news for nut growers.

Nut production in Australia has increased significantly over the past two decades. The size of nut orchards has also increased. Yet while the greater efficiency of large orchards and the positive market situation has generated interest from investors, the majority of nut orchards continue to be run as family businesses. In addition, many orchards are an important part of 'lifestyle farming' and provide loads of fun and satisfaction for weekend and semi-retired farmers.

Of the eight tree nut crops grown commercially in Australia, production volumes of four of these crops (almonds, macadamias, pecans and pistachios) is substantial and supported by modern processing and marketing facilities. Production of the other four nut crops is increasing at varying rates. Chestnut production has been relatively static for some years but production is now set to increase as chestnut processing opportunities are developed. Walnut production has also remained reasonably static over the past few decades but crops from large new orchards have boosted recent production and a rapid increase is expected within the next few years. It is expected that development of high-capacity walnut processing facilities will follow. Cashew production has been investigated since the 1960s but the difficulty in processing cashew product has thwarted development. At this stage cashew production is limited to one commercial grower with a few other plantations on the horizon. Hazelnuts have been grown widely in Australia for many decades on small-scale orchards, but larger plantings are being developed and the hazelnut industry is looking toward a positive future.

Different tree nuts are grown in different climates, from the tropics to cool temperate zones. Each nut type has a particular set of cultural requirements and processing and marketing systems. So what are these requirements and which nut grows best where? The information in this book comes from a combination of first hand experience, personal communication with others involved in the nut industries, and literary research. As editor of Australia's only nut industry journal for almost ten years, my knowledge of nut production increases with each issue that is published. Similarly, as a walnut grower, my knowledge of walnut cultivation and processing is fine-tuned as each season passes.

It is thirty years since my husband and I planted our first walnut trees and in that time there have been huge technical changes to walnut cultivation. Perhaps the greatest