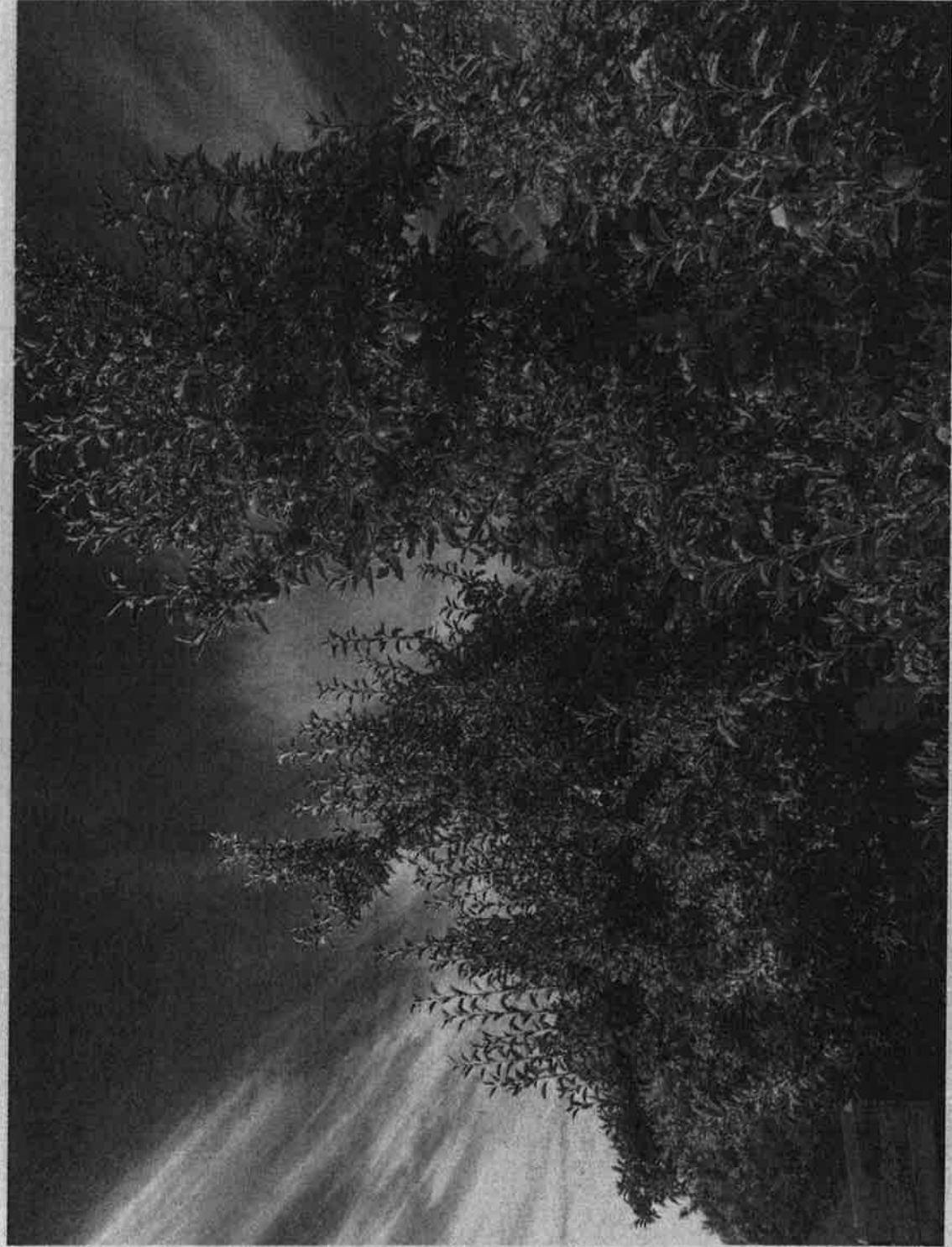


# New varieties make all the difference



## Karen Phelps

It was only the second year that Phil and Kirsty Greer had taken over Hastings-based Willowford Alma Alta Orchard and the global apple market crashed.

The couple found themselves caught up in a market of oversupply and knew they had two options – sell up or find another way. They then came across the new ENZA Jazz variety being developed in Havelock North.

“Once we’d seen it and tasted we knew we had to grow it. We’ve had some hard years – seven years of losses waiting for the crop to come to fruition – but we had to back it and wait until we had enough production to make things work.

“We’ve always known this apple was a winner,” says Phil.

Jazz is now exported all around the world and in high demand.

Around 60-70% of the orchard’s crops are the Jazz variety and this year Willowford Alma Alta will produce 55,000 cartons of the fruit.

Jazz is a cross of Braeburn and Royal Gala varieties with high flesh pressure generating crunch, high brix sugar levels giving a full flavour and natural resistance to disease.

Phil cites other advantages as high tonnage per hectare (up to 100 tonnes per hectare compared with the 50 tonnes averaged by other New Zealand varieties), excellent export pack outs (90% of the fruit grown is suitable for exportation) and taste.

Before Jazz, the apples the Greers were growing were commodity varieties.

Making the shift to owned and controlled varieties gives them a more exclusive product less vulnerable to market trends.

The Greers have 30,000 Jazz trees in their orchard. They are now focusing on spreading their risk by growing the ENZA Envy variety with the first

Jazz is a cross of Braeburn and Royal Gala varieties with high flesh pressure generating crunch, high brix sugar levels giving a full flavour and natural resistance to disease.



The Envy variety, above, is becoming the new phenomenon of the apple world; right, Phil and Kirsty Greer, enjoying the challenge of developing their orchard.



commercial plantings made at the orchard in 2009.

Pitched as a follow up to Jazz, the variety is bigger and redder but still with good crunch, brx and taste. Phil says Envy is becoming the new phenomenon of the apple world.

Envy was also developed using natural plant-breeding methods, crossing Braeburn with Royal Gala apples. The variety is grown in the Chelan Valley in Washington State and Hawke's Bay as well as Chile.

Switching to ENZA varieties has undoubtedly been profitable for the Greers' business – this year Jazz is expected to fetch around \$30 a case and Envy a staggering \$50, making Envy the highest paying apple in New Zealand this year.

"UK and Asia – the biggest apple markets – are fighting over them. In my lifetime I've never seen anything like this.

"All our new plantings will be Envy."

Phil studied horticulture at University and worked on orchards. This led him to buy his first piece of land in Taradale when he was 24 years old.

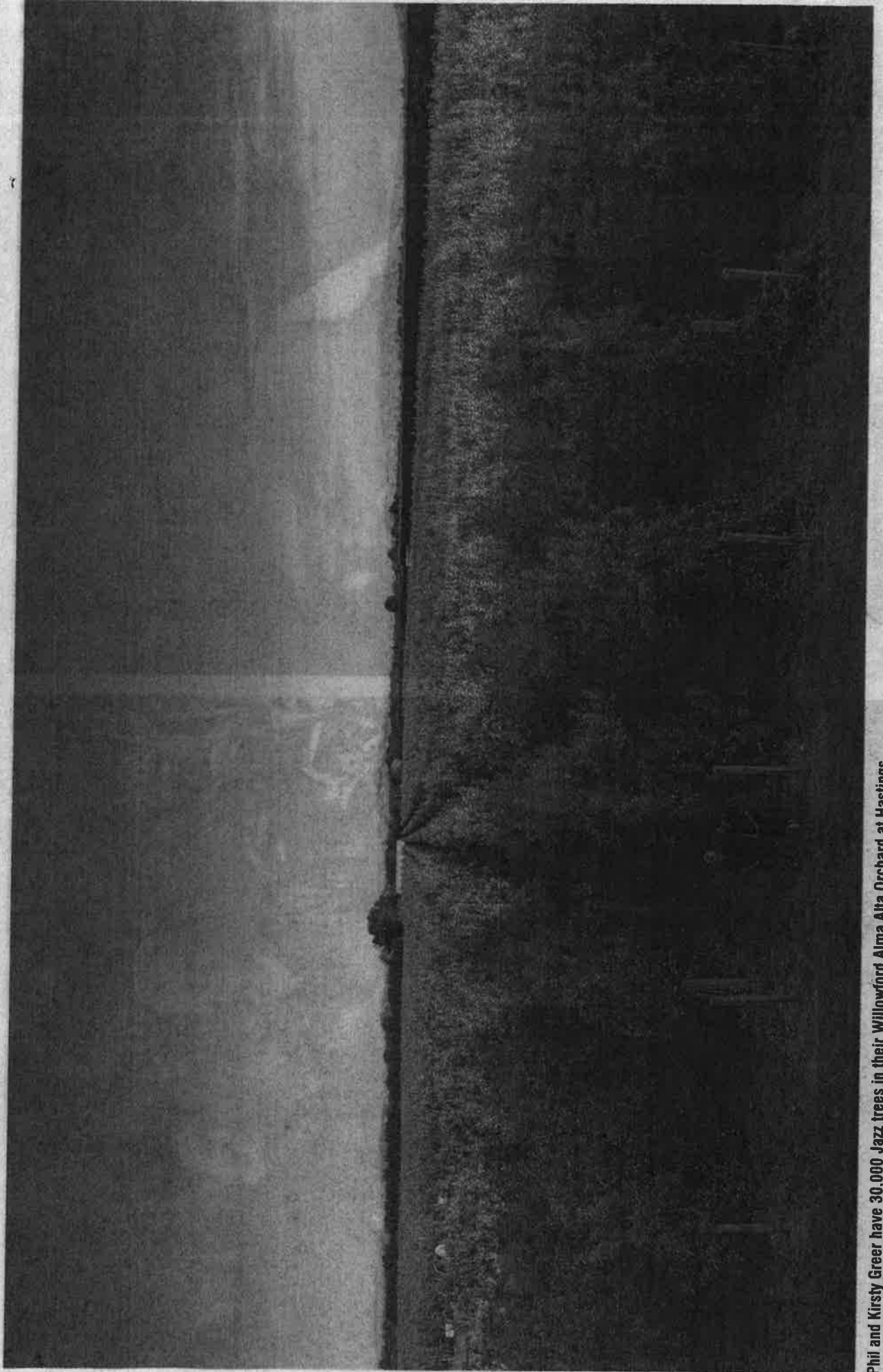
## "Once we'd seen it and tasted we knew we had to grow it."

He planted 10 acres of apples by hand.

This was later sold to fund the purchase of Willowford Alma Alta, which he had previously managed for the former owners.

When he and Kirsty met by the side of a rugby field it was a match (excuse the pun) made in heaven as she had come from a farming and orcharding family. Together they continue to build Willowford Alma Alta with more land still available for planting – they plan to plant 10 acres of Envy, 5000 trees, over the next couple of years.

The orchard currently produces 100,000 cartons of fruit annually at 18 kilograms per carton.



Phil and Kirsty Greer have 30,000 Jazz trees in their Willowford Alma Alta Orchard at Hastings.

# New varieties a winner

• from page 7

Willowford Alma Alta is operated by Phil and Kirsty and two other full-time staff, but ideally the couple would like to employ six.

During the busy season they use seasonal workers for the intensive Jazz picking with their main help coming from overseas backpackers who visit New Zealand on 12 month work visas and stay in tents and caravans around the orchard blocks.

Phil says that the orchard industry presents good career opportunities for young people so it's a shame that few are attracted to full time roles in the industry.

It's something that the Greers are seeking to change to promote the careers available right up to top level.

As part of the ENZA group of selected growers their role includes promoting the industry and the varieties they are growing.

ENZA is part of Turners & Growers, which works with Plant and Food Research and other entities to create new varieties of produce.

Turners & Growers has a network of over 41,000sqm of storage facilities around the globe and, in New Zealand, a fleet of 55 trucks that deliver produce from the grower to the pack-house and then out around the country.

Every year Turners & Growers ship over 20,000 refrigerated containers full of product worldwide.

Both Phil and Kirsty see huge demand for their ENZA products going forward: "We've only just scratched the surface of the market. Jazz grown in New Zealand is still under two million cartons per year," says Phil.

"As a comparison Washington State produces 150 million cartons each year. I believe that Jazz, and Envy are the two best varieties in the world right now. New Zealand is seen as being clean and green and the rest of the world loves our product."

