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# **Role of Calcium and Mechanical Damage in the Development of Localised Premature Softening in Coolstored Kiwifruit**

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy in Plant Science**

at

**Massey University**

**Ivan John Davie**

**1997**

***This thesis is dedicated to Nigel, Cliff and Nagin.***

***My thanks for the opportunity they provided, patience shown, motivation given and standard of excellence set.***

***"....know the truth and the truth will set you free."***

Preharvest, harvest, and postharvest factor(s) were examined to identify the causes of premature quality loss during long term coolstorage of kiwifruit (*Actinidia deliciosa*). Investigation centred around the role of mechanical damage and calcium in the development of softening disorders, including soft patches (localised soft areas on fruit surface), premature softening, and low temperature breakdown (LTB) during storage.

Kiwifruit were vulnerable to compression and impact from harvest onwards, with damage usually being expressed after a period of coolstorage. Physical damage normally just affected the fruit tissue in direct contact with the applied force. Impact damage, and to a lesser extent compression damage, depended on the size of the force and firmness of fruit when damaged. As kiwifruit softened, their susceptibility to soft patch development as a result of physical damage increased whereas the likelihood of flesh fracture in response to impact declined. These changes are attributed to the change in nature of the flesh, which is 'brittle' at harvest and 'viscoelastic' after softening. Physical damage to coolstored kiwifruit caused a slight drop in final firmness whereas there was no effect on firmness if it occurred at harvest.

Fruit with softening disorders consistently had lower calcium contents (about 12% less) than equivalent healthy fruit. Fruit with soft patches had a high phosphate content, low dry matter, and at harvest, a low soluble solids content. A causative role for calcium in soft patch development was demonstrated by preharvest calcium treatments that elevated calcium content of the harvested fruit. Other orchard factor(s) were probably the cause of a weaker relationship between calcium content at harvest and storage behaviour of fruit. Although firmness at harvest declined with later picking, after coolstorage, fruit harvested more mature had a higher firmness and lower incidence of LTB. Symptoms for LTB were consistent with chilling injury whereas soft patches appeared to be due to localised premature senescence and not low temperature.

A conceptual model of key factor(s) which cause the initiation and development of softening disorders in kiwifruit is proposed. Implications of this model for further investigation of these phenomena and for commercial handling of fruit are discussed. Further development of this model to produce a predictive model of fruit storage potential would require further characterisation of other important influences in storage behaviour.

*I mention the following people which may go some way to express my thanks and appreciation for the contribution they made to the completion of this thesis.*

*My supervisors, Prof Nigel H. Banks, Dr Clifford J. Studman and Dr Nagin Lallu for their help in design, construction and completion of this thesis.*

*To the New Zealand Kiwifruit Marketing Board for their financial support of projects and stipends. The many kiwifruit growers who made their time, orchards, packhouses, and fruit available for setting up and running of experiments.*

*To Massey University and its people who are dedicated to provide the opportunity and environment for education and research. Staff and students within the Department of Plant Science, the Plant Growth Unit, and Fruit Crops Unit.*

*Thanks to Anthony for his friendship. To all past and present flatmates of 116 Cuba street, such as Elana, Leanne, Sharn and Cory. Thanks to the "family" at the Good News Apostolic church for their support and humour over the years. To Mr and Mrs Yeoman for their friendship and support.*

*I would also like to acknowledge the help and moral support I received from my parents (Betty and Jack), brother (Craig), and sister (Suzanne). Thanks to Mandy, for the number of times she put my thesis first and herself second.*

*Finally, and most importantly my thanks go to the Banks family, for the time they sacrificed being with Nigel while he was helping me complete this thesis.*

# Table of Contents

v

<b>Dedication page</b> .....	ii
<b>Abstract</b> .....	iii
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	iv
<b>Contents</b> .....	v
<b>List of tables</b> .....	xii
<b>List of figures</b> .....	xiv
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	xix

## Chapter 1

<b>General introduction</b> .....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND .....	1
1.2 SCOPE .....	3
1.3 REFERENCES .....	4

## Chapter 2

<b>Softening of kiwifruit: literature review</b> .....	5
2.1 ONTOGENETIC DEVELOPMENT .....	5
2.1.1 Normal pattern of kiwifruit development .....	5
2.1.2 Preharvest changes in kiwifruit composition .....	5
2.1.3 Physiological processes associated with softening .....	6
2.2 FACTOR(S) AFFECTING KIWIFRUIT SOFTENING .....	7
2.2.1 Time .....	7
2.2.2 Turgor .....	8
2.2.3 Temperature .....	9
2.2.3.1 Physical effects of temperature .....	10
2.2.3.2 Physiological effects of temperature .....	11
2.2.4 Ethylene .....	12
2.2.4.1 Endogenous .....	12
2.2.4.2 Exogenous .....	14
2.2.5 Light .....	14
2.2.6 Maturity .....	15
2.2.7 Mechanical damage .....	15

# Table of Contents

vi

2.2.7.1	Impact . . . . .	16
2.2.7.2	Compression . . . . .	17
2.2.7.3	Vibration . . . . .	17
2.2.7.4	Grading equipment . . . . .	18
2.2.7.5	Packaging . . . . .	19
2.2.8	Mineral composition . . . . .	19
2.2.8.1	Calcium . . . . .	19
2.2.8.2	Phosphorus . . . . .	23
2.3	EVALUATION OF KIWIFRUIT SOFTENING . . . . .	23
2.4	LOSS OF FRUIT QUALITY DURING COOLSTORAGE . . . . .	24
2.4.1	Soft patches . . . . .	24
2.4.2	Low temperature breakdown . . . . .	25
2.5	CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	26
2.6	REFERENCES . . . . .	27
2.7	TABLE . . . . .	32
2.8	FIGURES . . . . .	33

## Chapter 3

	<b>Compression damage in kiwifruit . . . . .</b>	<b>35</b>
3.i	Abstract . . . . .	36
3.ii	Keywords . . . . .	36
3.1	INTRODUCTION . . . . .	37
3.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS . . . . .	38
3.2.1	Fruit . . . . .	38
3.2.2	Experimental design . . . . .	38
3.2.3	Assessment . . . . .	39
3.2.4	Mineral analysis . . . . .	40
3.2.5	Data analysis . . . . .	41
3.3	RESULTS . . . . .	41
3.3.1	Compression effects on area of soft patches . . . . .	41
3.3.2	Storage effects on area of soft patches . . . . .	41
3.3.3	Variation in area of soft patches under different compression loads . . . . .	42
3.3.4	Variation in area of soft patches between orchard lines . . . . .	42
3.3.5	Firmness . . . . .	42
3.3.6	Calcium . . . . .	43
3.4	DISCUSSION . . . . .	44
3.4.1	Compression . . . . .	44
3.4.2	Control fruit . . . . .	46
3.4.3	Firmness . . . . .	46
3.4.4	Calcium . . . . .	48
3.5	CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	48

## Table of Contents

vii

3.6	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	48
3.7	REFERENCES	49
3.8	TABLES	50
3.9	FIGURES	51

## Chapter 4

<b>Impact damage in kiwifruit</b>		<b>56</b>
4.i	Abstract	57
4.ii	Keywords	57
4.1	INTRODUCTION	58
4.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	59
4.2.1	Fruit	59
4.2.2	Experiment 1: effect of impact energy	60
4.2.3	Experiment 2: effect of storage on response to impact	61
4.2.4	Assessment	62
4.2.5	Data analysis	62
4.3	RESULTS	63
4.3.1	Experiment 1: effect of impact energy	63
4.3.2	Experiment 2: effect of storage on response to impact	65
4.4	DISCUSSION	66
4.5	CONCLUSIONS	68
4.6	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	68
4.7	REFERENCES	69
4.8	FIGURES	70

## Chapter 5

<b>Soft patch development in kiwifruit: effects of grading damage and packaging</b>		<b>75</b>
5.i	Abstract	76
5.ii	Keywords	76
5.1	INTRODUCTION	77
5.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	78
5.2.1	Fruit	78
5.2.2	Experiment 1: grading	78
5.2.3	Experiment 2: packaging	79
5.2.4	Transportation and storage	79
5.2.5	Assessment	80
5.2.6	Data analysis	80
5.3	RESULTS	80
5.3.1	Experiment 1: grading	80



## Table of Contents

viii

5.3.2	Experiment 2: packaging	81
5.4	DISCUSSION	81
5.5	CONCLUSIONS	84
5.6	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	84
5.7	REFERENCES	84
5.8	FIGURES	86

## Chapter 6

### Grader damage to kiwifruit after controlled atmosphere storage

6.i	Abstract	90
6.ii	Keywords	90
6.1	INTRODUCTION	91
6.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	92
6.2.1	Fruit	92
6.2.2	Experimental design	93
6.2.2.1	Experiment 1	93
6.2.2.2	Experiment 2	93
6.2.3	Transportation	94
6.2.4	Assessment	95
6.2.5	Mineral analysis	95
6.2.6	Data analysis	97
6.3	RESULTS	97
6.3.1	Experiment 1	97
6.3.2	Experiment 2	98
6.4	DISCUSSION	99
6.5	CONCLUSIONS	102
6.6	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	103
6.7	REFERENCES	103
6.8	TABLES	105
6.9	FIGURES	107

## Chapter 7

### Preharvest manipulation of kiwifruit calcium levels

7.i	Abstract	110
7.ii	Keywords	110
7.1	INTRODUCTION	111
7.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	113
7.2.1	Fruit	113

## Table of Contents

ix

7.2.2	Experiment 1: calcium dips	113
7.2.2.1	Permeance	114
7.2.2.2	Firmness, soft patches and calcium	115
7.2.3	Experiment 2: preliminary drying oil treatment	115
7.2.3.1	Firmness	115
7.2.3.2	Calcium	116
7.2.4	Experiment 3: screening drying oils	116
7.2.5	Experiment 4: Amsec oil spray	116
7.2.5.1	Permeance, fresh weight, firmness, soluble solids content and calcium at harvest	117
7.2.5.2	Firmness and soft patches after storage	117
7.2.6	Data analysis	117
7.3	RESULTS	118
7.3.1	Experiment 1: calcium dips	118
7.3.1.1	Calcium	118
7.3.1.2	Firmness	118
7.3.1.3	Soft patches	119
7.3.1.4	Permeance	119
7.3.2	Experiment 2: preliminary drying oil treatment	120
7.3.3	Experiment 3: screening drying oils	120
7.3.4	Experiment 4: Amsec oil spray	120
7.3.4.1	Permeance, fresh weight, firmness, soluble solids content and calcium at harvest	120
7.3.4.2	Firmness and soft patches after storage	121
7.4	DISCUSSION	121
7.4.1	Calcium dips	121
7.4.2	Preliminary drying oil treatment	123
7.4.3	Amsec oil spray	124
7.5	CONCLUSIONS	125
7.6	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	126
7.7	REFERENCES	126
7.8	FIGURES	128

## Chapter 8

### Soft patches and low temperature breakdown in kiwifruit: development in coolstorage 130

8.i	Abstract	131
8.ii	Keywords	131
8.1	INTRODUCTION	132
8.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	134
8.2.1	Fruit	134
8.2.2	Experimental Design	134
8.2.3	Assessment	134

## Table of Contents

x

8.2.3.1	Firmness and soluble solids content at harvest . . . . .	134
8.2.3.2	Firmness, soluble solids content, soft patches and low temperature breakdown after storage . .	135
8.2.4	Mineral analysis . . . . .	135
8.2.5	Data analysis . . . . .	135
8.3	RESULTS . . . . .	136
8.3.1	Experiment 1 . . . . .	136
8.3.1.1	Soft patches . . . . .	136
8.3.1.2	Low temperature breakdown . . . . .	136
8.3.1.3	Firmness . . . . .	136
8.3.1.4	Soluble solids content . . . . .	137
8.3.1.5	Calcium . . . . .	137
8.3.2	Experiment 2 . . . . .	137
8.3.2.1	Soft patches and low temperature breakdown .	137
8.3.2.2	Firmness and soluble solids content . . . . .	138
8.3.2.3	Calcium . . . . .	138
8.4	DISCUSSION . . . . .	139
8.5	CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	141
8.6	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	141
8.7	REFERENCES . . . . .	141
8.8	TABLE . . . . .	143
8.9	FIGURES . . . . .	144

## Chapter 9

<b>General discussion</b>		148
9.1	INTRODUCTION	148
9.2	KEY FRUIT ATTRIBUTES, HANDLING AND STORAGE	150
9.2.1	Calcium	150
9.2.2	Phosphate	152
9.2.3	Carbohydrate	152
9.2.4	Maturity	153
9.2.5	Compression	153
9.2.6	Impact	154
9.2.7	Vibration	156
9.2.8	Grading	157
9.2.9	Packaging	157
9.2.10	Water loss	158
9.2.11	Ethylene	159
9.2.12	Temperature	159
9.2.13	Time	160
9.3	CONCEPTUAL MODEL	160
9.3.1	Soft patches	161

## Table of Contents

xi

9.3.2	Premature softening of the whole fruit . . . . .	164
9.3.3	LTB . . . . .	165
9.4	IMPLICATIONS OF MODEL . . . . .	165
9.4.1	Flowering . . . . .	165
9.4.2	Early fruit growth . . . . .	166
9.4.3	Fruit maturation . . . . .	169
9.4.4	Harvest . . . . .	171
9.4.4.1	Fruit attributes . . . . .	171
9.4.4.2	Initial handling when harvested . . . . .	174
9.4.5	Grading . . . . .	176
9.4.5.1	At harvest . . . . .	176
9.4.5.2	After CA storage . . . . .	177
9.4.6	Packing . . . . .	177
9.4.7	Bulk storage . . . . .	178
9.4.8	Coolstorage . . . . .	178
9.4.9	Condition checking . . . . .	179
9.4.10	Export . . . . .	180
9.4.11	Market . . . . .	181
9.4.12	Consumer . . . . .	182
9.5	CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	183
9.6	REFERENCES . . . . .	184
9.7	TABLES . . . . .	187
9.8	FIGURES . . . . .	190

## Chapter 2

## General introduction

Table 2.1	Different growth phases associated with kiwifruit development (Pratt & Reid 1974). . . . .	32
-----------	--	----

## Chapter 3

## Softening of kiwifruit: literature review

Table 3.1	Mean $A^{sp}$ and percentage rejects (averaged over orchard lines and storage periods) of kiwifruit with and without compression at: (i) contact site between fruit; (ii) fruit surface outside the contact site; and (iii) total area of fruit. . . . .	50
Table 3.2	Mean $A^{sp}$ ( $\text{mm}^2$ ; averaged over orchard lines with and without compression during storage in pipes) at: (i) contact site between fruit; (ii) remainder of fruit surface; and (iii) total area of kiwifruit. . . . .	50

## Chapter 6

## Grader damage to kiwifruit after controlled atmosphere storage

Table 6.1	Overall mean final firmness ( $f^{final}$ ), area of soft patches ( $A^{sp}$ ), and percentage of rejects caused by the presence of soft patches for graded and control (not graded) kiwifruit after storage in CA at 0°C for Experiment 1. After grading, fruit were further stored for 7 weeks air coolstorage and 1 week simulated shelf-life; data are averaged over orchard lines (experimental unit = collection of 6 trays from 1 grading treatment). . . . .	105
Table 6.2	Mean calcium, phosphate, and dry matter contents of healthy, population (random sample), and soft patch affected kiwifruit averaged over orchard lines for control fruit in Experiment 1 (experimental unit = 2 subsamples from 33 fruit in 1 control (not graded) tray from 1 orchard line). . . . .	105
Table 6.3	Mean $f^{initial}$ (before grading) and $f^{final}$ (after being graded) of kiwifruit, stored for 7 weeks at 0°C and 1 week at 20°C, $A^{sp}$ (area of soft patches) and rejects for grading treatments in Experiment 2. Fruit had previously been stored for 20 weeks in CA storage and then 2 weeks air storage at 0°C. Each $f^{initial}$ observation is the mean of 72 fruit. Each $f^{final}$ , $A^{sp}$ , and Rejects observation is the mean of 792 fruit. Treatments were T: top layer of bin; B: bottom layer of bin; C: control; G: graded; $G_M$ : modified grader; $G_{16}$ : fruit at 16°C, graded; $C_{16}$ : fruit at 16°C, control; $G_0$ : fruit at 0°C, graded; $C_0$ : fruit at 0°C, control. . . . .	105

## Chapter 8

## Soft patches and low temperature breakdown in kiwifruit: development in coolstorage

Table 8.1	Mean $f$ (firmness) and soluble solids content ( $ss$ ) at harvest, and after 20 weeks coolstorage mean $f$ , $ss$ , $A^{sp}$ , and $Ca^{2+}$ (calcium concentration) for 3 orchards averaged over 3 storage temperatures and 3 harvest maturities for Experiment 1. Each $f$ and $ss$ value is the mean of 324 fruit. Each $A^{sp}$ value is the mean of 972 fruit. Each $Ca^{2+}$ value is the mean of 36 fruit. . . . .	143
-----------	--	-----

## Chapter 9

## General discussion

Table 9.1	Symptoms and exacerbating factor(s) associated with premature senescence of kiwifruit as a result of: <b>A</b> , physically induced soft patches; <b>B</b> , physiologically induced soft patches; <b>C</b> , rapid softening of whole kiwifruit; or <b>D</b> , the development of low temperature breakdown (LTB). . . . .	187
Table 9.2	Mean calcium contents of soft patch or healthy fruit amongst kiwifruit from 3 different populations in 3 different experiments. . . . .	189
Table 9.3	Sensory qualities of ripened kiwifruit. . . . .	189

## Chapter 2

## Softening of kiwifruit: literature review

- Figure 2.1** Diagrammatic representation of softening in kiwifruit, where: A, is the lag phase; B, is the period of accelerated softening; and C, is the period of softening deceleration. . . . . 33
- Figure 2.2** Relationship between temperature and storage life of fruit (Fidler et al. 1973). Curve A, is a fruit that has an extended storage life as temperature is lowered until the tissue freezes. Curves B and C, are for fruit that have differing levels of susceptibility to chilling injury (likely to be of subtropical and tropical in origin, respectively), in which storage life peaks and then decreases as temperature is lowered. . . . . 34

## Chapter 3

## Compression damage in kiwifruit

- Figure 3.1** Experimental arrangement of fruit placed in pipes which exposed them to compression for a particular storage period due to the weight of fruit above them. In the 'no compression' treatments, pipes were stored horizontally. . . . . 51
- Figure 3.2** Mean  $A^{sp}$  at the contact site of individual fruit at different positions ( $p$ ) in vertically (compression treatment) and horizontally (control) stored pipes during: A, LC (late coolstorage); and B, SL (simulated shelf-life) storage periods averaged over orchard lines. Fruit were assessed after a total storage period of 30 weeks at 0°C. Lines fitted to data for the compression treated fruit were: A,  $A^{sp} = 98 \pm 41.1 - (3.1 \pm 0.75)p$ ;  $r^2 = 0.35$ ; and B,  $A^{sp} = 392 \pm 74.9 - (11 \pm 1.4)p$ ;  $r^2 = 0.70$ . Symbols represent means of 32 fruit. . . . . 52
- Figure 3.3** Firmness ( $f$ ) of individual fruit at different positions in pipes for compression treatments for: A, LC (late coolstorage); and B, SL (simulated shelf-life) storage treatments averaged over orchard lines assessed after a total storage period of 30 weeks at 0°C. Symbols represent means of 32 fruit. . . . . 53
- Figure 3.4** Relationship between  $A^{sp}$  of different orchard lines of fruit and their firmness ( $f$ ) for: A, the entire fruit surface; and B, the area outside contact site, averaged across compression and storage treatments assessed after a total storage period of 30 weeks at 0°C (fitted equations are  $A^{sp} = 190 \pm 18.4 - (12 \pm 3.6)f$ ;  $r^2 = 0.64$  and  $A^{sp} = 89 \pm 6.4 - (6 \pm 2.1)f$ ;  $r^2 = 0.61$ , respectively). Symbols represent means of 330 fruit. . . . . 54
- Figure 3.5** Relationship between mean  $A^{sp}$  at the contact site of fruit exposed to compression and firmness ( $f$ ) of non-compressed controls for orchard lines assessed after a total storage period of 30 weeks at 0°C (fitted equation is  $A^{sp} = 173 \pm 14.6 - (10 \pm 3.1)f$ ;  $r^2 = 0.62$ ). Symbols represent means of 165 fruit. . . . . 56

## Chapter 4

## Impact damage in kiwifruit

- Figure 4.1** A, Mean  $A'$  (area of soft patches at the impact site); and B, mean  $A^T$  (area of soft patches on the total fruit surface), plotted against impact energies for impacts onto kiwifruit from 0 through 0.08 to 1.6 J at harvest. Fruit were assessed after 19 weeks at 0°C, with or without simulated shelf-life (SED = 18 and 26, respectively) averaged over orchard lines. Symbols represent the means of 128 fruit. . . . . 70
- Figure 4.2** Impact (1.6 J) at harvest to fruit with damage symptoms (whitening of flesh; right hand fruit) that stained blue-black (left hand fruit) in the presence of iodine due to unconverted starch after 27 weeks coolstorage at 0°C. . . . . 71
- Figure 4.3** Mean percentage of kiwifruit rejectable because of area of soft patches at the impact site and over the total fruit surface, following impacts with different impact energies applied at harvest and assessed after 19 weeks storage at 0°C (averaged over orchard lines and simulated shelf-life treatment). Symbols represent the means of 256 fruit. . . . . 72
- Figure 4.4** Change in: A, firmness ( $f$ ); and B, mean  $A'$  assessed after 27 weeks storage at 0°C as functions of time of impact ( $t$ ; impact energies 0.94 J;  $r^2 = 0.93$ ; fitted equation for  $A'$  is  $A = 192 \pm 2.9 + (2.9 \pm 0.39) t$ . Symbols represent the means of 38 and 114 fruit for  $f$  and  $A'$ , respectively. . . . . 73
- Figure 4.5** Mean  $A'$  (area of soft patches at the impact site) assessed after 27 weeks storage at 0°C, plotted against mean firmness ( $f$ ) of fruit when impact during coolstorage. Symbols represent the means of 38 and 114 fruit for  $f$  and  $A'$ , respectively. . . . . 74

## Chapter 5

## Soft patch development in kiwifruit: effects of grading damage and packaging

- Figure 5.1** Percentage of rejectable ( $R_j$ ) fruit on the basis of  $A^{sp}$  after 19 weeks in coolstorage following different grader treatments plotted as a function of severity of grading ( $sg$ ) averaged over orchard lines ( $r^2 = 0.95$ ; equation for fitted line  $R_j = 1.6 \pm 0.34 + (0.36 \pm 0.042) sg$ ; each symbol represents the mean of 792 fruit). . . . . 86
- Figure 5.2** A, Mean  $A^{sp}$ ; and B, percentage of rejectable fruit on the basis of  $A^{sp}$  for different packaging types after 19 weeks in coolstorage and averaged across 8 orchard lines of fruit (each symbol represents the mean of 792 fruit; cardboard single layer tray (card), wooden single layer tray (wood), tri-pack bottom layer fruit (tp<sup>B</sup>), tri-pack middle layer (tp<sup>M</sup>), and tri-pack top layer (tp<sup>T</sup>)). . . . . 87



- Figure 5.3** Relationship between mean  $A^{sp}$  and whole fruit firmness ( $f$ ) after 19 weeks coolstorage for individual orchard lines of fruit, averaged across all packaging types ( $r^2 = 0.81$ ; fitted equation is  $A^{sp} = 148 \pm 6.0 - (8 \pm 1.6)f$ ; each symbol represents the mean of 495 fruit). . . . . 88

## Chapter 6

### Grader damage to kiwifruit after controlled atmosphere storage

- Figure 6.1** A, Relationship between final firmness ( $f^{final}$ ) and initial firmness ( $f^{initial}$ ) of graded and control (not graded) kiwifruit after 7 weeks at 0°C and 1 week 20°C storage; and B, difference between  $f^{initial}$  and  $f^{final}$  values ( $\Delta f$ ) for graded and control fruit against  $f^{initial}$  averaged across fruit within orchard lines for Experiment 1 (equations for fitted lines for: A,  $f^{final} = 7.3 \pm 1.29 + (0.074 \pm 0.0193)f^{initial}$ ;  $r^2 = 0.28$ ; and B,  $\Delta f = -7.3 \pm 1.29 + (0.93 \pm 0.019)f^{initial}$ ;  $r^2 = 0.98$ ; Symbols represent means of 33 fruit). Fruit had previously been stored for 20 weeks CA and then 2 weeks air storage at 0°C. . . . . 107
- Figure 6.2** Mean  $A^{sp}$  of control (not graded) kiwifruit plotted against mean  $f^{final}$  assessed after 7 weeks at 0°C and 1 week at 20°C for orchard lines for Experiment 1 (equation for fitted line  $A^{sp} = 614.4 \pm 62 - (47.0 \pm 0.97)f$ ;  $r^2 = 0.56$ ; symbols represent means of 33 fruit). Fruit had previously been stored for 20 weeks CA and then 2 weeks air storage at 0°C. . . . . 108

## Chapter 7

### Preharvest manipulation of kiwifruit calcium levels

- Figure 7.1** Change in: A, mean calcium concentrations ( $[Ca]$ , mmol/kg,  $r^2 = 0.94$ , equation of line is  $[Ca] = 8.8 \pm 0.41 + (0.40 \pm 0.070)d$ ); B, mean  $A^E$  outside the impact site ( $r^2 = 0.85$ , equation of line is  $A^E = 85 \pm 9.5 - (5 \pm 1.6)d$ ); and C, mean rejects ( $R^E$ ) due to soft patches on fruit outside the impact site ( $r^2 = 0.81$ , equation of line is  $A^E = 20 \pm 2.3 - (1.1 \pm 0.38)d$ ) for differing number of calcium dips ( $d$ ) assessed after coolstorage at 0°C for 24 weeks. Each data point is the mean value of 320 fruit. . . . . 128

- Figure 7.2** Effects of differing number of oil applications ( $ap$ ) applied to whole vines: **A**, permeance to water vapour ( $P'_{H_2O}$ ) after the 6th application ( $P'_{H_2O}$ ;  $r^2 = 0.97$ ; equation of fitted line  $P'_{H_2O} = 21.2 \pm 0.73 + (1.4 \pm 0.16) ap$ ) and at harvest ( $P'_{H_2O}$ ;  $r^2 = 0.99$ ; equation of fitted line  $P'_{H_2O} = 16.8 \pm 0.41 + (1.44 \pm 0.091) ap$ ), respectively; **B**, firmness at harvest ( $f$ ;  $r^2 = 0.74$ ; equation of fitted line is  $f = 85 \pm 2.3 - (1.2 \pm 0.52) ap$ ); **C**, harvest soluble solids content ( $ss$ ;  $r^2 = 0.98$ ; equation of fitted line is  $ss = 7.81 \pm 0.062 - (0.15 \pm 0.014) ap$ ); and **D**, mean calcium of harvested fruit ( $[Ca]$ , mmol/kg;  $r^2 = 0.83$ ; equation of fitted line,  $[Ca] = 9.3 \pm 0.38 - (0.26 \pm 0.084) ap$ ) assessed after 26 weeks at 0°C. Each data point is the mean value of 30 fruit. . . . . 129

## Chapter 8

### Soft patches and low temperature breakdown in kiwifruit: development in coolstorage

- Figure 8.1** **A**,  $A^{sp}$ ; and **B**, rejects due to LTB in kiwifruit harvested from 3 orchard lines 3 different times, assessed after 20 weeks storage and averaged over storage temperatures for fruit from Experiment 1. Each symbol represents the mean of 324 fruit. . . . . 144
- Figure 8.2** Incidence of rejects due to LTB in kiwifruit for 3 orchard lines in 3 storage temperatures and assessed after 20 weeks storage averaged over time of harvest for fruit from Experiment 1. Each symbol represents the mean of 324 fruit. . . . . 145
- Figure 8.3** Incidence of rejects due to LTB in kiwifruit stored at 3 temperatures from 3 different times of harvest and assessed after 20 weeks storage averaged over 3 orchard lines for fruit from Experiment 1. Each symbol represents the mean of 324 fruit. . . . . 146
- Figure 8.4** Mean  $A^{sp}$  on kiwifruit after 20 weeks storage plotted against the product of harvest soluble solids content ( $ss$ ) and calcium concentrations ( $[Ca]$ , mmol/kg) for 6 orchard lines averaged over harvest times and storage temperatures from Experiment 2. Symbols represent means of 108 fruit. Fitted equations for line  $A^{sp} = 225 \pm 19 - (3.0 \pm 0.46) ss \times [Ca]$ ;  $r^2 = 0.78$ . . . . . 147

## Chapter 9

### General discussion

- Figure 9.1** A conceptual model of factor(s) which initiate and develop: physically induced soft patches (A); physiologically induced soft patches (B); premature softening of the whole fruit (C); and low temperature breakdown (LTB; D) in kiwifruit. . . . . 190

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Figure 9.2	Implications of the model for the initiation and development of premature fruit senescence due to soft patches, rapid softening of whole fruit, and low temperature breakdown (LTB) for the management of kiwifruit during the preharvest, harvest, and storage phases to minimise loss of fruit quality. . . . .	191
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$Abs$	absorbance
$A^E$	area of soft patches on fruit excluding those at the impact site (m <sup>2</sup> ; Sections 4.2.4, 7.2.2.2)
AH	treatment: compression 96 h immediately after harvest (Section 3.2.2)
$A^I$	area of soft patches at the impact site (m <sup>2</sup> ; Sections 4.2.4, 7.2.2.2)
$ap$	number of oil applications
$A^{sp}$	area of soft patches (m <sup>2</sup> ; Sections 3.2.3, 5.2.5, 6.2.4, 7.2.5.2, 8.2.3.2)
$A^T$	area of soft patches on the total fruit surface (m <sup>2</sup> ; Section 4.2.4)
B	treatment: fruit taken from the bottom layer of bin (Section 6.2.2.2)
C	treatment: control fruit, not graded (Section 6.2.2.2)
CA	controlled atmosphere
card	treatment: fruit held in a cardboard single layer tray (Section 6.2.2.2)
$cp$	phosphate concentration (mmol/kg)
$C_0$	treatment: fruit not graded with a flesh at 0°C (Section 6.2.2.2)
$C_{16}$	treatment: fruit not graded with a flesh at 16°C (Section 6.2.2.2)
$d$	number of calcium dips
DT	treatment: compression when fruit transported by truck (450 km; Section 3.2.2)
$E^I$	impact energy (J)
ET	treatment: compression during early phase of coolstorage (12 weeks; Section 3.2.2)
$\Delta f$	difference between initial and final firmness (N)
$f$	firmness (N)
$f^{initial}$	initial firmness (N)
$f^{final}$	final firmness (N)
$g$	gravitational constant (m/s <sup>2</sup> )
G	treatment: graded (Section 6.2.2.2)
$G_M$	treatment: modified grader (Section 6.2.2.2)
$G_0$	treatment: fruit graded with flesh at 0°C (Section 6.2.2.2)
$G_{16}$	treatment: fruit graded with flesh at 16°C (Section 6.2.2.2)
h	hours
$h^i$	drop height (m)
LC	treatment: compression during late coolstorage (Section 3.2.2)
LTB	Low temperature breakdown
$m$	mass (kg)
NZKMB	New Zealand Kiwifruit Marketing Board
$p$	individual fruit positions within pipes
$P_{H_2O}$	permeance to water vapour (mol/s.m <sup>2</sup> .Pa)
$R^E$	percentage of rejectable fruit due to soft patches outside the impact site (%)
$R_j$	percentage of rejectable fruit due to soft patches (%)
$sg$	severity of grading
SL	treatment: compression during simulated shelf-life (Section 3.2.2)
$SP_{contact}$	soft patches present on fruit at the contact site (m <sup>2</sup> ; Section 3.2.3)
$SP_{outside}$	soft patches present on fruit, but not at the contact site (m <sup>2</sup> ; Section 3.2.3)
$ss$	soluble solids (%)
$t$	time (weeks)
T	treatment: fruit taken from the top layer of bin (Section 6.2.2.2)
$tp^B$	treatment: fruit held in tri-pack bottom layer (Section 5.2.2)
$tp^M$	treatment: fruit held in tri-pack middle layer (Section 5.2.2)
$tp^T$	treatment: fruit held in tri-pack top layer (Section 5.2.2)
wood	treatment: fruit held in wooden single layer tray (Section 5.2.2)