

ODA: Free pesticide collections

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

With nearly 100,000 pounds of waste pesticides collected and properly disposed of, Oregon Department of Agriculture's Pesticide Stewardship Specialist Steve Riley views the state's first round of pesticide collection events as a success.

"I would say it definitely met our expectations," Riley said.

The department is wrapping up its first round of collection events with two in May:

- May 9 in Coos Bay, Ore.
- May 22 in Dallas, Ore.

The department added the Dallas event — the eighth and final event of the biennium — because of widespread interest in a collection event held in December in McMinnville.

"We had a little extra money in our budget and we knew that the Yamhill (County) event was really popular and we were getting calls asking if we were going to have another one in the Willamette Valley, so we figured this was an opportunity to squeeze in one more before the end of the biennium," Riley said.

ODA collected an average of 15,000 pounds in the first six collection events, Riley said, with the low recorded at an event in Hermiston in October, where 14 participants brought in 8,600 pounds of waste pesticides; and the high recorded in the McMinnville event, where 54 participants brought in 39,218 pounds of waste pesticides.

The department is conducting the events with help from the Department of Environmental Quality. DEQ formerly conducted collection events on a hit-and-miss basis using grant funds and other sources, according to Kevin Masterson, toxics coordinator for the DEQ.

ODA put \$200,000 of the \$1.5 million lawmakers allocated its Pesticide Stewardship Program in the 2013-15 biennium toward the collection events, marking the first time the state had a steady stream of dedicated funds for pesticide collections, Riley said.

The department contracts with Clean Harbors Environmental Services to conduct the events.

The department launched its first event a little more than a year after the program was funded with an event in Milton-Freewater. Events followed in Hermiston, Ontario, Madras, the one in McMinnville, and an event in Medford on March 7.

The department chose sites for the collection events based on "what we thought would be the heaviest pesticide use area and whether they had had an event recently or not," Riley said. "We wanted to go into areas that we knew had not had events for a while."

Because the program is now part of ODA's line-item budget, Riley said he expects it to be funded in the next biennium budget, but he couldn't say at what level.

"I think there is plenty of need for this," he said. "I think we are just hitting the tip of the iceberg. Washington has been doing this for 20 years or so and they have collected over 2 million pounds. And the reason they have been able to do this is because Washington has had consistent funding."

"Now that we have had one round of events, I think people are definitely more aware of it and will be more likely to use this service the next time around," he said.

Riley said to look for the department to revisit some sites in the next biennium and to travel to some new sites. "I think it will be a mixed bag," he said. "I think we will go back to some of the same areas, and we will select some new areas."

The ODA's free pesticide collection events are open to farmers and other commercial and institutional operators in counties near event sites.

Interested participants must apply no later than two weeks prior to an event by mailing or emailing an application to Clean Harbors, which conducts the events. Applications can be obtained through local soil and water conservation districts or by calling Clean Harbors at 253-639-4240, extension 2813.

Record apple crop: Plenty left to sell

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — The record 2014 Washington apple crop keeps shrinking as packers get rid of apples they can't sell to retailers.

They've sold 86.6 million, 40-pound boxes of fresh apples since the season began Sept. 1, but as of April 1 they've also gotten rid of 11.4 million boxes by sending them to juicers, composting, livestock feeders or just dumping them.

"The difficulty is that we still have a huge volume left to sell and we're still battling a lot of East Coast and Michigan competition and South African and Chilean imports are coming in pretty aggressively," said Keith Matthews, CEO and general manager of First Fruits Marketing of Washington in Yakima.

It costs \$7 per box to truck Washington apples to the East Coast compared with \$6 a box for Chilean packers to ship apples there on ocean-going vessels, Matthews said. Chile is offering fresh crop with fewer problems and perhaps a better guarantee, he said.

As of April 1, Washington's industry had 56.8 million boxes of apples left to sell, Matthews said. That compares with 47 million left to sell a year ago for a crop of 28.6 million fewer boxes. Apples are harvested in the fall and stored for sales through the year.

The total 2014 fresh crop is now estimated at 143.6 million boxes, down from 145.9 million a month ago and 155 million at the start of



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

From left, Sandy Cortez, Reynalda Villanueva and Geraldine Walls look for bruises, bitter pit and any other culls of Red Delicious apples at McDougall & Son Inc.'s new Baker Flats packing plant north of Wenatchee, Wash., on April 9. The industry has too many Reds and is selling them below profit.

November.

"Washington's situation is just grinding through the season. It has more apples that it can currently move and China hasn't opened as soon as hoped," said Desmond O'Rourke, a private agricultural economist and consultant in Pullman.

Russia is lifting its one-year ban on Western produce a few months early for some countries, but it hasn't for the U.S. and it wouldn't help ap-

ples much, O'Rourke said.

European apple shipments to Russia are down only one-third under the ban when they are supposed to be down 100 percent, he said. A lot of apples, probably some of Poland's big 2014 crop, are being smuggled into Russia through Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, he said.

Matthews said organic apples and pears are the bright spots for Washington shippers, but that "over the

whole game there are only a few things selling at relatively good levels and it's hard to find that business. A majority of apples are selling below profit."

The price of Red Delicious is down to \$10 per box, he said. That's well below break-even.

"Who knows what this portends for the next crop," he said. "If we have another big crop and a second year of bad returns then that equals the

value of assets for growers."

Of the 2.3 million-box reduction in total crop in the past month, about 1 million is Red Delicious, 400,000 is Fuji, 200,000 is Granny Smith, and Golden Delicious and Gala account for 300,000 apiece, Matthews said. Those apples either went to juicing or were dumped.

Historically, the industry packs about 18 to 19 boxes per bin but now it's more like 16, he said.

Some 6.9 million boxes of apples were packed and ready for shipment on April 1 compared to 5.8 million a year ago, he said.

"That's a 20 percent increase and indicates we're not selling as rapidly as we'd like. It creates downward pressure," he said.

Prices may not have bottomed out yet, he said.

Shippers lost fruit that was caught in the port labor slowdown, but adjusted by selling more fruit on the domestic market, he said.

The asking price for mid-size Washington extra fancy Golden Delicious was \$13 to \$15 per box on April 6, the same as last month and down from \$20 to \$22 a year ago, according to USDA Market News. Gala was \$16 to \$18, the same as a month ago and down from \$28 to \$30 a year ago.

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