

Retired couple returns to pears as harvest shifts into high gear

Smaller fruit, more cullage seen because of hot weather

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

DRYDEN, Wash. — For about 20 years, Evelyn Arnold was Chelan County auditor overseeing county finances, elections, licensing and document recording at the courthouse in Wenatchee. Now she's taking part in the annual pear harvest as it kicks into high gear in Central Washington state.

After her stint with the county, she spent five years as financial services manager for the Secretary of State's office in Olympia and superintendent of elections for King County while her husband, Randy, finished out 45 years as a conductor and brakeman for BNSF Railway in Western Washington.

Newly retired, they're now helping their nephew, Aaron Hargrove, run their pear orchard south of the small Wenatchee Valley town of Dryden. Randy's father, Arlee Arnold, an "Arkie" migrant picker, bought the first five acres years ago.

A certified public accountant, Evelyn was sorting bin tickets along with doing orchard payroll and accounts payable. She fixed breakfast for the 9:30 a.m. break for their 20-some pickers, a bonus that helps ensure enough



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Evelyn and Randy Arnold level d'Anjou pears in a bin ready to go to the warehouse from their orchard near Dryden, Wash., on Sept. 4. Pears are smaller and cullage is up in the Wenatchee Valley of Washington state from prolonged heat in June.

pickers in an era of shortages. It's all different work for Evelyn, but she's getting the hang of it.

"At this point, it still seems it would be easier to work for someone else because working for yourself you tend to get distracted with grandkids and all of that," she said. They have 10, eight close by.

The Arnolds and other pear growers in the Wenatchee Valley are in the midst of harvest and dealing with smaller fruit and more cullage because of prolonged excessive heat in June.

The valley, from Wenatchee 23 miles up river to Leavenworth, is the heart of the nation's pear production. The Wenatchee district, the northern half of Central Washington,

produces more than 9 million, 44-pound boxes of pears annually with most of that coming from the Wenatchee Valley.

Growers have coped with less water this season because of drought, but the bigger issue, several say, is fruit size and cork, dimples that cause decay, from too much heat early on.

The crop is about one size smaller, on average, than normal, which equates to 10 percent less volume than the May 28 estimate, said Randy Smith, a Cashmere grower.

Jim Koempel, a grower and neighbor of the Arnolds, said the crop may be down 10 to 15 percent.

"There's more cork and sunburn this year than normal, considerably more," he said.

"Labor is adequate but not excessive. Most people would like two to three more people on their crews."

The Pear Bureau Northwest, in Portland, forecast the Northwest crop at 20.4 million boxes on May 28. It revised the forecast to 19.9 million boxes on Aug. 18, still the fifth largest crop on record. It's 4 percent less than 2014 but just 1 percent less than the five-year average. The record is 21.6 million in 2013.

The Wenatchee district forecast was revised downward from 9.4 million to 9.24 million boxes.

The next district in volume, Yakima, is forecast down 12 percent, the Mid-Columbia (Hood River, Ore.) is down 7 percent and the smallest in vol-

Smaller California pear crop helps PNW

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

A smaller California pear crop — combined with smaller stone fruit and apple harvests there this year — bode well for Pacific Northwest pear sales, says Kevin Moffitt, president of The Pear Bureau Northwest in Portland.

That means shipments of the Pacific Northwest crop, estimated at 19.9 million, 44-pound-boxes, should increase quickly in September, Moffitt said. Sales will be pushed by bureau promotions emphasizing back-to-school and snacking to help move the larger inventory of smaller fruit expected, he said.

In-store sampling will help build demand early in the season to drive mo-

mentum for the year, he said.

California harvested 2.77 million, 36-pound boxes of fresh-crop pears this season and had shipped 1.5 million as of Aug. 26. Some 1.23 million, or 45 percent, remained, according to the California Pear Advisory Board in Sacramento.

Of the total, 2.1 million boxes were Bartlett from the Sacramento Delta, Lake County and Mendocino districts.

California fresh pear crops have been diminishing in recent years because of declining acreage and canners paying more to increase their volume. The fresh-crop high of the last 7 years was 4.69 million boxes in 2009.

ume, Medford, is up 16 percent.

"All districts are expecting sizes to be down one to two sizes due to heat and some hail," said Kevin Moffitt, bureau president.

Cork will contribute to premium, No. 1 grade, being just 83 to 86 percent of the crop, he said. Normally, it's higher. "Much of the fancy (lesser) grade will go export and there will be plenty of No. 1 grade this season," he said.

D'Anjou harvest will wrap up in a few weeks. Bartlett is done and with good quality. It is 8.71 percent (397,624 boxes) shipped as of Aug. 28 compared with 8.18 percent (418,258 boxes) a year ago, Moffitt said. There's 4.2 million boxes of Bartlett left to ship versus 4.7 million last year.

Pear wholesale prices have held much better than apple prices in the past year.

Washington governor leads trade trip to Japan, S. Korea

By RICHARD SMITH
For the Capital Press

TOKYO — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee surprised patrons at an outlet of a Hawaiian-style fast food restaurant chain in the Japanese capital on Sept. 4.

Customers were quietly eating their meal when Lamb Weston Asia Marketing Manager Keiji Yumoto announced the governor's presence.

"The Washington state governor!" exclaimed several customers, who rushed to take a picture of Inslee with their camera or cell phone.

Inslee handed out a complimentary order of french fries to each customer. Kua'Aina Japan, which has 23 outlets, uses Washington frozen potatoes exclusively.

Inslee's public relations effort was part of a visit he led of a 95-member Washington trade mission, including about 15 representatives of the state's agribusiness sector, here Sept. 2-5.

The group made a similar visit to South Korea Aug. 31 to Sept. 1.

Part of the potato industry representatives' purpose for coming here was to talk with end users of the Washington product and explain the hurdles exporters faced with the months-long West Coast port slowdown earlier this year, said Matt Harris, Washington State Potato Commission as-



Washington State Department of Agriculture

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee serves Washington french fries to patrons at a Kua'Aina Japan outlet in Tokyo Friday Sept. 4.

sistant executive director and director of governmental affairs.

Washington exported \$200 million of frozen processed potatoes to Japan last year, but because of the slowdown, the industry lost an estimated \$50 million of business opportunity, Harris said.

Because of a nematode issue, Japan restricts its imports of U.S. potatoes to frozen products, with the exception of fresh product in sealed containers, and only for chipping purposes from Washington and some other states during the February-July Japan potato off-season.

Although potatoes got a big emphasis, other products received a push, state Director of Agriculture Derek Sandison said.

The state government is trying to get Washington's fresh blueberries and potatoes into

the countries the team visited, Sandison said.

"There has to be a decision by the Japanese and South Korean governments," he said.

Washington state is also promoting confectionery products, and trying to increase onion shipments, said Joseph Bippert, the Department of Agriculture Commodity Inspection Division's international marketing manager.

"We (also) want to increase exports of our craft beers," Bippert said.

On the confectionery side, Seattle Popcorn will on Sept. 14 send a popcorn shipment to an 80-outlet retail customer, its first venture into either Japan or South Korea, company president Jesse Greene said.

"We met with multiple distributors and retailers, educating them about the popcorn market in the U.S. and what we foresee for Japan," Greene said.

Almond growers finishing harvest of slightly smaller crop

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

GERBER, Calif. — Almond growers in California are wrapping up one of the earliest harvests in memory as yields have come in ever-so-slightly lighter than last year's crop.

The shaking and sweeping in the Tehama County orchards owned by brothers Kevin and Eric Borrer are about three-quarters done as their harvest began on Aug. 15.

"We are running right about the same as last year," Kevin Borrer said. "Some fields are up and some are down, but on average we're right about the same. ... Our quality has been good. There have been some bad stories about worm damage here and there, but ours has been our normal good quality."

Statewide, yields have been slightly lighter, said Robert Curtis, the Almond Board of California's director of agricultural affairs. Yields are on pace to meet the National Agricultural Statistics Service projection of 1.8 billion meat pounds, down 3 percent from its May forecast and 4 percent from last year's crop. In all, 2 billion



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Kevin Davies operates a tractor with a sweeper that picks up almonds as a bankout driver follows. The harvest was proceeding Sept. 4 at Tehama Angus Ranch in Gerber, Calif.

meat pounds were harvested in 2013.

"With the good weather, the harvest is progressing well with no real issues," Curtis said in an email.

While the Borrers' wells have been holding up, the continued stress on trees because of the ongoing drought is blamed for the overall decline in tonnage. Mike Mason, a grower and processor who chairs the almond board, said earlier this summer that farmers are "doing everything within their power to conserve water."

The board expects nuts to be harvested from 890,000 bearing acres statewide, up slightly from the historic high of 880,000 bearing acres forecast by NASS last year. However, the average nut set per tree was 5,874, down 12 percent from the 2014 crop and the average kernel weight for all varieties sampled was 1.43 grams, down 1 percent from the 2014 average of 1.45 grams, according to the board.

Navel orangeworm has also been an issue for some growers, said Dani Lightle, a University of California Cooperative Extension crop adviser in Glenn County. The worm's larvae feeds on nuts.

Warm weather during the spring and summer helped accelerate the crop's development, and water-stressed trees have hull split earlier, Lightle said.

"Most of the growers are going to be winding down in the next couple of weeks," she said. "It really depends on the size of the operation. The smaller guys (are finishing), while those who have lots and lots of acreage have had more to balance."

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