



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Maribel Zuniga packs Gala apples at Northern Fruit Co. in East Wenatchee, Wash., on Oct. 5, while David Allen, quality control manager, makes a point to Scotty Lee and Gordon Zou of Kingo Fruit, Guangzhou, China.

Chinese fruit importers visit Pacific Northwest

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — The Washington Apple Commission and The Pear Bureau Northwest hosted a delegation of Chinese fruit importers this week in an effort to boost apple and pear sales.

The nine importers — from Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Dalian — visited orchards and apple and pear packing facilities in Wenatchee and Yakima, Wash., and Hood River, Ore.

“The new crop Gala coming in is very soft, not crunchy enough. They say it’s from the heat you had in June. I hope quality improves to compete with our (China’s domestic) Fuji and Gala that starts at the end of October,” said Qian Yinjun, general manager of Shanghai Guowang Produce Co., Shanghai.

Yinjun and the other eight importers received an industry overview at the apple commission office in Wenatchee on Oct. 5 before watching apples being packed at Northern Fruit Co. in East Wenatchee and visiting nearby Banning Orchards.

They toured McDougall & Sons Inc. and Custom Apple Packers in Wenatchee before heading to Zirkle-Rainier Fruit in Yakima on Tuesday. Evans Fruit Co. in Cowlitz, CPC International Apple Co. in Tieton and Legacy Fruit Packers in Wapato were on their schedule in the Yakima area.

Their Hood River itinerary

included Duckwall Fruit and Diamond Fruit Growers. They were to end the week on Oct. 9 at the The Pear Bureau in Portland and visiting downtown retail markets of Fred Meyer, Zupan’s and Whole Foods.

“We think China could be the third-largest market for Washington apples in the near future,” said Todd Fryhover, the apple commission president.

Mexico, Canada and Taiwan traditionally have been the top three markets. Washington normally exports 30 percent of its apples.

Red and Golden Delicious apples from Washington, Oregon and Idaho were allowed into China in 1993. Other Washington varieties entered from Hong Kong via “gray” markets.

Reds and Goldens were banned from August 2012 to Oct. 31, 2014, after disease was found in some shipments. When shipments resumed, they were immediately hindered by work slowdowns at U.S. ports.

Full-varietal access in both directions was announced by the U.S. and Chinese governments on Jan. 26. Paperwork to make it happen was finished in June. Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, apparently was the first U.S. marketer to sell varieties other than Reds and Goldens into China, shipping a couple hundred 40-pound boxes of Gala into Guangzhou on June 20.

From Aug. 17 through Sept. 30, 155,445 boxes of Washington apples have been shipped to

China, according to the Washington State Tree Fruit Association.

Shippers hope to top a 3 million box peak to China-Hong Kong in 2010-2011. Fryhover and others envision 10 million boxes — about \$200 million — in sales annually in a few years.

Desmond O’Rourke, a retired Washington State University agricultural economist and an apple and China expert, has warned China can be an unreliable trading partner. He has said devaluation of the Chinese yuan by 2 percent in August is small enough that it shouldn’t hurt exports early this season. A bigger concern is if more devaluations follow, he said.

Chelan Fresh Marketing, Oneonta Starr Ranch Growers and Evans Fruit Co. have shipped the most apples to China.

“A lot of us have core customers (in China) we’ve developed over years but that doesn’t mean these guys aren’t important,” Tom Riggan, general manager of Chelan Fresh, said of the delegation.

“We always try to meet anybody new. They could help us reach outlying Chinese cities. There’s ton of opportunity. There’s a lot of online direct sales into homes,” Riggan said.

China bought 8,600 boxes of 2015 crop Northwest pears so far through Sept. 30, up 8.8 percent from the same period last year despite devaluation of the yuan, said Lynsey Kennedy, international marketing manager at The Pear Bureau.

More California winemakers using less water to grow grapes

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER
Associated Press

RUTHERFORD, Calif. (AP) — The grape vines that grower Frank Leeds tends in Napa Valley stand among the unheralded heroes of California’s drought, producing decade after decade of respected Cabernets and other wines without a drop of added water.

In a state where farms and dairies take the biggest gulp of the water supply, Leeds and the owners of his Frog’s Leap Winery are among a minority — but a growing minority — of California growers and winemakers who believe that when it comes to wine grapes, the less irrigation, the better.

“This is not struggling, skinny, tiny grapevines, right?” Leeds asked proudly earlier this growing season while leading a tour through the dry-farmed rows of wine grapes.

Frog’s Leap’s vines stood several feet apart from each other, giving the roots plenty of room to plunge into the soil and find moisture. Just across a narrow country road, black tubing of drip irrigation laced through another vineyard’s grape vines, more crowded but looking no less thoughtful than their unwatered neighbors at Frog’s Leap.

Wine grapes, California’s No. 3 cash crop, in general are far less thirsty than the state’s No. 2 cash crop, almonds. But with 615,000 acres of wine grapes in production in Califor-

nia, wine industry trends in water use clearly have an impact on the overall water supply.

As wine growers close out harvest this month, California is ending a fourth year of severe drought, with mandatory cutbacks in water for cities and towns statewide, and for many farms.

Overwhelmingly, the debate in California’s wine industry over water use is driven by what’s best for the quantity and quality of the grape crop, more so than conservation.

All sides — the irrigated, the unirrigated, and the in-be-

tween — feel strongly that their way is the right way.

For Marc Mondavi, a third-generation producer in one of California’s most influential wine families, it only makes sense that grapes thrive best with an occasional sip of running water.

“I always tell people, I give them a little scenario: They put you and I in the middle of the Mojave Desert,” in a foot race, Mondavi said. “Who’s gonna run the distance? More than likely the person who’s had some water” to drink along the way.

Proposal seeks to keep ports open during labor disputes

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

PASCO, Wash. — A bill setting up automatic triggers to start the Taft-Hartley Act process in the event of future labor or management disruptions at U.S. ports is being proposed by Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash.

Newhouse announced his Ensuring Continued Operations and No Other Major Incidents, Closures or Slowdowns (ECONOMICS) Act at Easterday Farms in Pasco on Oct. 5. Easterday, a family potato farm and packing operation, is one of thousands of farms throughout the West that were impacted by the slowdown of cargo at 29 West Coast ports from May 2014 through February 2015.

It was caused by contentious contract negotiations between the Pacific Maritime Association and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

Newhouse was joined for his announcement by Washington Farm Bureau President Mike LaPlant and Matt Harris, assistant executive director of the Washington State Potato Commission.

The bill would mandate mediation in labor disputes and require a board of inquiry be convened when certain economic triggers are met. The board would be required to report to the president and the public to recommend whether a Taft-Hartley judicial injunction should be sought to order an end to a dispute. The president or state governors would still have to seek the injunction.

The triggers are:

- When four or more ports are involved.
- When 6,000 or more port workers are affected.

When U.S. exports drop 15 percent or more in one month or 5 percent or more in two consecutive months.

Any single trigger could start the process, but the bill is still in draft stage and Newhouse is seeking feedback for improvements, he told Capital Press. He said he hopes to introduce the bill within a couple of months.

The definition of strike would be broadened throughout U.S. labor law to include slowdowns, lockouts or threatened strikes or lockouts. A board of inquiry could be triggered for any of those.

The bill is meant to complement HR3398, the Protecting Orderly and Responsible Transit of Shipment (PORTS) Act, authored by Newhouse and Rep. Dave Reichert, R-Wash. The PORTS Act, and a companion measure in the Senate, would allow governors of seaport states and territories to invoke the Taft-Hartley Act to order dock workers to work.



AP Photo/Ben Margot File

Container ships wait at the dock to be unloaded at the Port of Oakland Feb. 12 in Oakland, Calif. A months-long work slowdown clogged export traffic through 29 West Coast ports. Legislation under consideration in Congress is aimed at preventing a replay of the slowdown.

When U.S. exports drop 15 percent or more in one month or 5 percent or more in two consecutive months.

Any single trigger could start the process, but the bill is still in draft stage and Newhouse is seeking feedback for improvements, he told Capital Press. He said he hopes to introduce the bill within a couple of months.

The definition of strike would be broadened throughout U.S. labor law to include slowdowns, lockouts or threatened strikes or lockouts. A board of inquiry could be triggered for any of those.

The bill is meant to complement HR3398, the Protecting Orderly and Responsible Transit of Shipment (PORTS) Act, authored by Newhouse and Rep. Dave Reichert, R-Wash. The PORTS Act, and a companion measure in the Senate, would allow governors of seaport states and territories to invoke the Taft-Hartley Act to order dock workers to work.

The PORTS Act includes slowdowns, not just strikes or lockouts, in the Taft-Hartley process.

“There is a lot of interest in preventing the kind of economic losses we experienced this past season,” Newhouse said. “We still haven’t regained (the markets of) some of the commodities that were lost so it’s still costing producers today.”

The slowdown cost up to \$2.5 billion per day and contributed to an anemic 0.2 percent annualized growth rate in the first quarter of 2015, Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., said in introducing a bill last May that would set up an early warning system of abnormal port operations.

Exports and imports of many commodities through the West Coast were impacted by last year’s slowdown. The Washington apple industry lost \$100 million in sales, according to the Northwest Horticultural Council.