

Sweetheart overtakes Bing as popular cherry variety

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Sweetheart has overtaken Bing.

That's what several hundred growers heard at the Northcentral Washington Stone Fruit Day, sponsored by Washington State University Extension and the Washington State Fruit Commission, at the Wenatchee Convention Center on Jan. 19.

Sweetheart, a late variety red cherry originating in Summerland, B.C., in 1994, overtook Bing in Pacific Northwest production in 2015 or perhaps in 2014, said B.J. Thurlby, president of the State Fruit Commission and Northwest Cherry Growers.

While he didn't have red cherries broken down by variety, the largest shippers all told him they had more Sweetheart in 2015 than Bing, Thurlby said.

"It's a trend growers need to understand when they are looking at what to plant," he said.

WSU's cherry breeding program began in 1949 and one of its first releases was Rainier. The program's goal is to breed early varieties that are crack resistant and



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Ana Capi picks Rainier cherries at Prey Orchard in Orondo, Wash., last June 18. Demand for cherries was strong last season. Growing, packing and marketing cherries was discussed at Washington State University's Northcentral Stone Fruit Day in Wenatchee on Jan. 19.

late varieties that are mildew resistant for Washington and Oregon, said Ines Hanrahan, postharvest physiologist of the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission. Size, firmness, color and taste are

key attributes being sought.

PNW cherry crops have grown to be in the 20 million, 20-pound box range since 2009 with a peak of 23.2 million in 2014 and a final last season of 19.3 million,

Thurlby said. A 21.3-million-box crop is likely this year if recent trends persist, he said. Following a 5.3-million, 18-pound box California crop in May, the PNW crop in June hit a record 11.9

million, 20-pound boxes but demand still exceeded supply, he said.

Marketers and retailers scheduled early July advertising in early June based on the belief that there would be a lull in supply between Bing and late varieties in early July, Thurlby said. But the hottest June on record accelerated harvest, causing a market glut in early July that tumbled prices, he said.

"It was a real mess and disappointing for me and I'm sure all of you," he said.

Volume peaked at 600,000 boxes shipped on June 25 compared with a July 25 peak two years earlier and 18.7 million boxes were shipped in a compressed 60-day window, he said. Sweetheart normally has 80 to 90 days between bloom and harvest but was at 56 days, he said.

James Michael, Northwest Cherry Growers domestic promotions director, said there's room for larger crops given health benefits of cherries.

Americans average 1.5 units of cherries per person per season and if that rose 1 unit PNW growers would have to produce 28.4 million boxes to meet demand, he said.

Apple tree orders not slowing down

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

EAST WENATCHEE, Wash. — Orders for new apple trees aren't slowing down despite record Washington apple crops in recent years, the owner of a major nursery says.

"I think there are probably more trees growing (in nurseries) than in quite a while. The six haven't slowed down any," said Pete Van Well, president of Van Well Nursery in East Wenatchee.

The six are Van Well and five other nurseries that each produce about 1 million trees per year or more, said Bill Howell, managing director of Northwest Nursery Improvement Institute in Prosser, Wash.

The six grow fruit trees for orchards in the Pacific Northwest and across the nation. Beside Van Well are: C&O, Wenatchee; Gold Crown, Wenatchee; Willow Drive, Ephrata; Cameron, Eltopia; and Brandt's Fruit Trees, Yakima.

Little Cherry Disease spreading in Wenatchee

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

Little Cherry Disease is now about 1,000 acres in Wenatchee and spotted wing drosophila was a bigger problem in 2015 than the previous five years.

Little Cherry Disease has been increasing slowly throughout Central Washington since 2009 or before with Wenatchee as the hot spot, Tim Smith, WSU Extension tree fruit specialist emeritus, said during the Northcentral Washington Stone Fruit Day at the Wenatchee Convention Center, Jan. 19.

It's hard to know how extensive it is because not everyone reports it, but it's probably resulted in about 1,000 acres of cherry orchard removal in the past several years in the Wenatchee area, said Andrea Bixby-Brosi, a research associate at the WSU Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center in Wenatchee.

The incurable pathogen comes in three strains and results in small, bitter-tasting fruit that's unmarketable. It moves back and forth between neighboring orchards despite removal and replanting, Smith said. It's not a good idea to replant right after removal, he said.

The disease is spread by apple and grape mealy bugs and roots growing into each other.

Bixby-Brosi and WSU entomologist Elizabeth Beers are involved in a three-year research project funded by Washington, Oregon and California to better understand and manage the disease.

Symptoms of small, bitter fruit usually show up two weeks before harvest but some infected trees are without symptoms, she said.

"We want to come up with a way for growers to know if they have symptomless trees and how many to remove and where to look," she said.

Beers talked about spotted wing drosophila, saying 2015 was the worst year for the pest in cherries since it arrived in Central Washington in 2010. There were 317 packing house finds compared with a previous high of 44, she said. Early warmup of spring temperatures last February and March probably accelerated the pest's launch out of winter dormancy, she said.

Entrust, Delegate, Exirel and Warrior are insecticides that do well in combating spotted wing, she said. Pesticides vary in length of effectiveness and growers have to weigh cost versus value of crop, she said.



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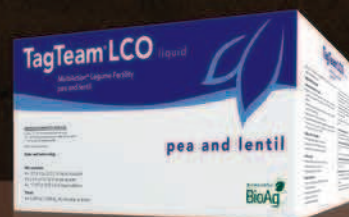
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