

Washington

New tree fruit specialist meets growers

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Hundreds of tree fruit growers in Northcentral Washington received their first introduction to the region's new Washington State University Extension tree fruit specialist at annual meetings held Jan. 18 through 21.

Tianna DuPont emceed Stone Fruit Day, Pear Day and Apple Day at the Wenatchee Convention Center and a similar meeting in Chelan. She later said she enjoyed meeting many growers and hearing about what they're doing.

"I'm excited to continue providing spaces for learning and understanding and how to best apply research," she said. "That was my emphasis in Pennsylvania and is key to



Dan Wheat/Capital Press
Tianna DuPont, WSU Extension tree fruit specialist for Northcentral Washington.

the position here."

Her research in Pennsylvania was in soil quality, organics and ways to use cover crops and other biorenovation strategies, which are important in tree fruit.

DuPont asked growers to complete a questionnaire on their needs to help her prioritize her work. She said she

enjoys holding field days, farm trials and small, participatory study circles. She said she likes working with young growers to keep the next generation coming along. DuPont succeeded Tim Smith, Nov. 1, who held the position for 32 years and retired Aug. 1, 2014.

DuPont grew up near Issaquah, graduated from Whitman College in Walla Walla in 2001 with a bachelor of science degree in environmental studies. She received her master's in integrated pest management from University of California-Davis in 2008.

She was a sustainable agriculture and vegetable and small fruit educator for Penn State University in Nazareth, Pa., from 2008 into the fall of 2015. She worked with organics, soil health, cover crops,

reduced tillage, grazing and new farmers. Previously, she was an agricultural extension specialist for the Peace Corps, teaching fruit and vegetable production and pest management in Bolivia.

Her WSU job is applied research and extension. She will do field research with immediate application to the tree fruit industry and will translate and disseminate her own research and research of others to the industry and public. The position is entirely supported by WSU. Her annual salary is \$65,000, according to the state Office of Financial Management.

Her office is at the WSU Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center, 1100 N. Western Ave. Smith's office was at the Chelan County Courthouse.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press
Netting covers apple trees at Zirkle Fruit Co.'s CRO Orchard south of Rock Island, Wash., on June 8, 2015. Netting has many benefits, new research shows.

Research reveals benefits of netting apple trees

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Netting over apple trees has been used for hail, wind and bird protection but new research by Washington State University shows many other benefits.

Netting reduces heat, sunburn, light intensity and soil temperatures but increases photosynthesis, says Lee Kalcits, tree fruit physiologist at the WSU Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center. He spoke at the Northcentral Washington Apple Day at the Wenatchee Convention Center on Jan. 21.

The educational day was sponsored by WSU Extension and the Northcentral Washington Fieldmen's Association.

"Our long summer days and high light intensity creates stress on trees," Kalcits said.

Research on a McDougall & Sons orchard near Quincy and trees at the center in Wenatchee measured the effect of red, blue and pearl colored netting above trees, in tree canopies and soil. Sensors measuring temperatures, wind speed, soil moisture, leaf photosynthesis and other aspects created a lot of online data that's still being processed, Kalcits said.

Different colors of netting modify the spectrum of light reaching trees and may result in different physiological responses that are still to be determined, he said.

There was little difference in mean temperature and relative humidity above trees with netting versus those without, but there was a 40 percent reduction in wind speed "which is pretty significant," Kalcits said.

Humidity was higher inside tree canopies, indicating trees were more active, he said. Sunburn was less under netting, he said.

Thermal imaging cameras on an 85-degree day measured fruit surface temperature at 105 degrees outside the netting and 90 degrees under the netting, he said. Those differences become greater as temperatures get higher, he said.

The soil temperature of trees under netting was 2 to 4 degrees lower and soil moisture was 2 percent higher, which again is "pretty significant" and good for roots, he said.

Photosynthesis rates in leaves outside netting are low in the morning, then increase in late morning before dropping off in the afternoon, Kalcits said. Under netting it doesn't drop off until later afternoon, so trees are less stressed, he said.

"Washington normally has more light than leaves can use and if light intensity is too high for too long it can cause damage," he said.

Netting reduces light intensity 20 percent without harming photosynthesis, and in some cases may help it, he said.

The research project was funded by the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission in Wenatchee, but will continue through 2018 with federal funding, he said.

More study on the effect of different colored netting and measurement of water savings is yet to be done, he said. It's a big savings if netting replaces or reduces overhead sprinkler cooling, he said.

Netting can last seven to 10 years, with blue holding up better than red, he said. Costs depend on the density of poles and whether netting is retrofitted to an existing orchard or installed with a new planting, he said. More poles make a stronger structure but add cost. Systems can run \$9,000 to \$12,000 per acre or \$3,000 to \$5,000 if simpler, he said.

State agencies unload on truck weight bill

Wheat and wine growers advocate for measure

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — A bill to increase the weight limit for trucks carrying agricultural products has run into roadblocks from the Washington Department of Transportation and the State Patrol.

Agency representatives warned the Senate Transportation Committee on Monday that heavier trucks are less safe and tear up roads faster.

"We would encourage you to not take lightly the increase in weight," WSP legislative analyst Melissa Van Gorkom said.

Senate Bill 6265 would raise the per-axle weight limit to 22,000 from 20,000 pounds for farm products traveling on state roads. The new limit would not apply to trucks on federal interstate highways.

"We think this is a good way to get our crops harvested and hauled in from fields safely and efficiently, especially when we have a short time during harvest to get this accomplished," Washington Association of Wheat Growers lobbyist Diana Carlen said.

The Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers also testified in support of the bill.

In an admittedly rough estimate, DOT projected that



Don Jenkins/Capital Press
A truck carrying hay travels west in Washington state. A bill proposed by a Yakima senator would raise weight limits for truck carrying agricultural goods on state roads. The higher limit would not apply to federal interstate highways.

raising the weight limit by 2,000 pounds per axle for farm trucks would increase the cost of maintaining roads by \$15 million to \$25 million a year.

Maintaining bridges would cost \$32 million a year, according to DOT's estimate. DOT assumed the heavier loads would shorten the lives of some 1,800 bridges to 65 years from 75 years, forcing the state to replace them sooner.

DOT's director of construction, Chris Christopher, said raising the weight limit

by 10 percent would translate into a 50 percent increase in wear and tear.

"Our current bridges and pavements were not designed for this additional loading," he said.

The bill, as introduced, would apply year-round to all agricultural products, including timber.

The bill's prime sponsor, Transportation Committee Chairman Curtis King, R-Yakima, said he planned to continue working on the bill and taking a closer look at how much road construc-

tion costs would increase.

"Our intent is to help the farmers," he said.

A bill introduced last year to increase load limits on tires to 600 from 500 pounds per inch of tread encountered similar concerns about wear and tear on pavement. The bill failed to pass.

Congress froze weight limits on interstate highways in 1991. A proviso in a congressional spending bill passed late last year authorized Idaho to raise truck weight limits to 129,000 from 105,000 pounds.

Cultivating conference in Spokane covers value, future of co-ops

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

SPOKANE — The Cul-

tivating Cooperative Roots Conference will be Feb. 5-7 at the Spokane Convention Center.

The event is a forum for cooperative members from all sectors to share their best practices, said Diane Ga-

saway, executive director of Northwest Cooperative Development Center in Olympia, the organization putting on the conference.

"There are lessons that all cooperatives can learn from one another," she said. She pointed to similar practices for governance, communication, marketing and access to financing in the agriculture, health care, financing and building sectors.

Online

<http://roots.nwcdc.coop/>

The conference is aimed at members of existing co-ops and people looking to start a co-op or who have recently started one.

"Co-ops are a response to market failure," Gasaway said. "They're not easy businesses to maintain. It really

needs to be a critical component of your livelihood — access to services that aren't otherwise available, access to markets, creation of jobs. If that's not there, they might survive for a while, but they won't be very active."

David Thompson, president of the Twin Pines Cooperative Foundation in Davis, Calif., will deliver the keynote speech about the future of co-ops. Gasaway said Thompson is an iconic figure of sorts in the cooperative community, a historian and a member of the Cooperative Hall of Fame.

"He can tell that story in a way that others don't necessarily have the expertise and background in, where we were and where we're going," she said.

The conference is also targeting the youth and Latino communities. The development center is interacting with more Latino owners of agricultural lands who are raising produce and selling it to farmers' markets and in larger markets, Gasaway said. "Together we're stronger," Gasaway said. "It should be inclusive rather than exclusive."

All program materials will be translated into Spanish, and simultaneous interpretation will be offered during the conference.

Gasaway expects 250 people to attend.

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