

Orchardists learn best ways to grow new Cosmic Crisp apple

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ROCK ISLAND, Wash. — Techniques to minimize “blind wood” are the most important for orchardists to know in growing Washington’s new apple, the Cosmic Crisp, a leading expert says.

Blind wood is too much limb spacing between fruit and results in fruit growing on the outer edge of the tree canopy, where it is more susceptible to sunburn.

Girdling and notching bark produces more shoots, reducing blind wood and clustering fruit closer to the stem of the tree, Stefano Musacchi, Washington State University endowed chair of tree fruit physiology and management, told growers at field events on April 7.

Girdling and notching is best done in late February and early March, he said. Blind wood also is held in check by summer mechanical pruning, he said.

About 50 growers attended a morning talk at the WSU Roza Research Orchard north of Prosser in the morning and another 50 attended the same presentation in the afternoon 120 miles to the north at the WSU Sunrise Research Orchard south of Rock Island.

Musacchi, Tom Auvil, research horticulturalist at the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission; and Kate Evans, WSU apple breeder, all based in Wenatchee, spoke at both



Photos by Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Stefano Musacchi, Washington State University tree fruit physiologist, shows growers a Cosmic Crisp apple tree in spindle tree style at the WSU Sunrise Research Orchard near Rock Island, Wash., on April 7. Commercial plantings of the new variety will start next spring.

events. Evans said they hope to offer another field day in June to demonstrate mechanical pruning of the new variety.

The Cosmic Crisp, also known by its breeding name WA 38, is a much anticipated release of the WSU apple breeding program, with 48 growers selected by drawing to plant the first 600,000 trees in the spring of 2017. Enough trees will be propagated by nurseries that draw-

ings won't be necessary in the following years.

Growers have ordered more than 1 million trees for 2018 and more for 2019.

The apple was bred from Enterprise and Honeycrisp varieties in 1997 and has a sweet, tangy flavor that ranks high in taste, texture and beauty and has many qualities of the popular Honeycrisp with fewer horticultural challenges, Evans has said.

Cosmic Crisp is a type four variety, Musacchi said, meaning it has long branches and a lot of blind wood. The variety also responds quickly to nitrogen and too much causes excessive growth, he said.

Cosmic Crisp was planted in 2013 on two different rootstocks and using the European V-trellis, spindle and biaxial types of tree architecture.



A Cosmic Crisp apple leader was pruned the winter before last causing this year's flower clusters in the proximity where horticulturalists want apples to grow.

V-trellis promotes better distribution of flower clusters but isn't suitable for mechanical pruning, Musacchi said. He said he prefers biaxial because two stems instead of one divides vigor, holding it down, and rows of two stems in the same plane form a fruiting wall, increasing light to fruit.

Auvil said pollination varieties should be planted every 30 feet in high-density Cosmic Crisp plantings.

Lynnell Brandt, president of Proprietary Variety Man-

agement in Yakima that is coordinating the commercialization of Cosmic Crisp for WSU, attended both events.

Angel Farias, manager of a Valley Fruit Co. orchard near Royal City, said the Wapato-based company plans to plant WA 38 next spring at the orchard he manages and sent him to the field day to learn about it.

"I came to learn ways to grow it right," he said. "You don't want to start off on the wrong foot."

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88th Annual California State FFA Leadership Conference

Thousands of FFA students pack the Selland Arena in Fresno each year for the FFA's California state convention, which this year will be held April 21-26.

From left, Miles Sheldon and Tracy Starich of Brandt Agricultural Products talk with FFA students at the 2015 California convention career fair.

Tyler Pruett of Stockton, Calif., practices drilling bolts at the 2015 California FFA convention career fair.

FRESNO — An address by state Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross is among the scheduled highlights of the 88th annual California State FFA Leadership Conference, to be held here April 21-26.

Ross will attend the morning general session on April 25 in Selland Arena, where more than 5,000 FFA members pack the stands each year for rock concert-style assemblies while attending numerous other activities at the city's downtown convention center.

With the theme “Electrify,” students in high school FFA programs throughout California will converge to participate in contests, hear inspiring speakers, attend a career fair and other activities and elect a new slate of officers for 2016-17.

“California FFA members, you have continually proven that with your power and light, great things happen,” the state leadership team of Joelle Lewis, Sydnie Sousa, Breanna Holbert, Trevor Autry, Danielle Diele and Tim Truax told members in a welcoming message on the convention's website.

“We challenge you to bring all of your energy and passion to create new relationships, celebrate successes and meet your potential!” the group wrote.

The event kicks off with various speaking, interview and parliamentary procedure contests on April 21-22 and its Opening Session in Selland Arena is set for 8 p.m. April 23. In eight arena sessions, students will hear remarks from national FFA representatives, outgoing state officers and other dignitaries and enjoy performances by the state band, choir and talent contest participants.

The scheduled appearance by Ross comes as the CDFA's three-year-old agriculture-themed license plate program has generated nearly \$500,000 for education. The department in January handed out \$249,352 in the second round of grants from the CalAgPlate program, including \$212,000 for FFA leadership and development programs.

“Agricultural education helps to connect consumers to our farms and ranches and provides a greater appreciation for California's agricultural diversity,” Ross said in January.

A popular conference feature each year is the career fair, at which California community colleges and university ag programs are joined by such out-of-state entries as Iowa State University and Utah State University as well as companies such as Nutrena CropScience and Brandt Agricultural Products. This year's career fair will be held April 25.

“This is a great networking opportunity,” fair organizer and California State University-Fresno student Kelsey Dugan said at last year's conference. “It's to get to know people and communicate with each other, to meet people in the industry, and from there they can successfully integrate into the university or to working.”

Students will vote on officer candidates on April 25 and the new slate of officers will be announced in the final session on April 26. Lewis, a San Luis Obispo resident who is the current state president, was among 59 candidates for state office last year, including 35 who were interviewed and 12 who were named as finalists.

California's FFA convention is one of the organization's biggest and follows the Oregon FFA State Convention, which drew 1,400 students to Oregon State University on March 18-21. Washington state's will be held May 12-14 in Pullman, Wash., and Idaho's was held April 6-9 in Twin Falls, Idaho.

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