

Frost nips at Michigan cherry buds

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

Frost minimally damaged cherry buds in west central Michigan the morning of April 5 but it was light enough that there still should be a full crop, one of the state's leading tree fruit producers says.

Temperatures dropped to 17-18 degrees for a few hours that morning and there was no inversion so growers were unable to use wind machines to pull warm air down, said Don Armock, president of Riveridge Produce near Sparta, Mich.

Drones were sent aloft hunting for warm air and couldn't find any, he said.

"Some auto-start (wind) machines kicked on and temperatures around trees got colder so those were turned



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

A honeybee collects pollen from apricot blossoms in an East Wenatchee, Wash., orchard March 29. Blossoms like these turn brown if damaged by frost. So far, Washington has escaped frost but Michigan cherries were lightly nipped.

off," Armock said.

Clouds can help create an inversion of warm air 35 to

75 feet above the ground, but skies were clear and an Arctic front caused temperatures to plummet.

Armock said it helped that it was short-lived but the greater help was that buds were not very developed. Apples in the region were at silver tip, just beginning bud swell.

West central Michigan, called the Ridge country, is where most of the state's tree fruit is grown. Trees are still more dormant to the north and to the south buds are a quarter-inch green, depending on variety, he said. Temperatures didn't go much below the mid-20s in the south, he said.

"We were forecast to get colder this weekend but now that's been revised upward," Armock said. "I'd like to tell you we are home free but that

isn't how this works."

Buds are more susceptible to frost closer to bloom but the lower-than-normal temperatures expected during the next two weeks should delay bloom, which lessens frost danger, he said.

Cherries normally bloom in the Ridge country the first week of May and apples bloom May 10-15.

The same cold snap occurred in New York, where growers are collecting data, said Jim Allen, president of the New York Apple and Cherry Growers Association in Rochester. It's too early to know if there was any damage, he said.

New York had about a 33 million box fresh and processed apple crop in 2015 after people first thought it would be 27 million because

of frosts last spring, Allen said.

So far this season, there have been no major frosts in Washington but they can be harmful into early May.

No frosts have hit California, either, and it's doubtful any will because weather has been warm and crops are early, said Daniel Moznett, director of marketing for Grower Direct Marketing in Stockton.

Four years ago, spring freezes devastated apple crops in New York and Michigan, leaving Washington in the enviable position of having a huge crop and little competition.

It made for a stellar sales season for Washington and a poor one for New York and Michigan, the largest apple producers after Washington.

Grazing can continue despite ruling

Government ordered to study issue along Oregon-California border

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Cattle will be allowed to continue grazing along the Oregon-California border despite their propensity to "drift" into unauthorized national forest areas.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has rejected a request by environmental groups to block livestock grazing on 48,000 acres in the ecologically sensitive Siskiyou Crest.

An earlier ruling by the 9th Circuit held that the U.S. Forest Service had violated federal environmental law by insufficiently studying the impacts of "cattle drift" from California's Klamath National Forest into Oregon's Rogue River Siskiyou National Forest.

The Forest Service argued that a federal judge was correct in previously dismissing an environmentalist lawsuit because the effects of cattle drift on the region's environment are minimal and quickly corrected by ranchers.

However, the appellate court agreed with the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center and Klamath Forest Alliance that forest managers "provided essentially no information" about grazing in unauthorized areas and overturned that earlier decision.

The 9th Circuit ordered the agency to better account for the environmental impacts of cattle drift, which occurs due to the difficulty of fencing remote areas.

While they won this legal point, the environmental plaintiffs nonetheless asked the 9th Circuit to reconsider its opinion because it didn't prohibit grazing while the government updated its environmental analysis.

The 9th Circuit has refused that motion and amended its previous ruling to clarify that current Forest Service grazing plans for the region should remain in place.

The environmentalists claimed that vacating grazing authorizations for the Siskiyou Crest would effectively stop grazing, but the 9th Circuit took a different view.

Contrary to those claims, the 9th Circuit found that vacating the existing permits would require the "reinstatement of earlier permits on terms less protective of forest resources."

For that reason, the current grazing plans should stay effective until the Forest Service decides they should be replaced, the ruling said.

Crane & Crane to sell through Chelan Fresh

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

BREWSTER, Wash. — A small, historic apple company near Brewster, Crane & Crane Inc. will begin selling its traditional apple and pear varieties through Chelan Fresh Marketing in Chelan this fall.

"We have chosen to join forces in marketing our fruit with our longtime neighbors

in the northern district of Washington. Our high-elevation location allows Crane & Crane to produce firm, high-quality fruit that fits well in the Chelan Fresh program," Rachel Crane Sullivan, 31, company president, said in a news release. She declined further comment. The company has sold its fruit through Honeybear Growers, Brewster.

Crane & Crane also produces ENZA club varieties and will continue to market that fruit through channels exclusive to those varieties, the news release states.

In 2010, Sullivan, then vice president, said the company owns about 1,000 acres of orchard and packs about 800,000 boxes of apples annually. Her great-great-grandfather, George Crane, settled

across the Columbia River from Brewster in 1909 and planted his first apple trees in 1912.

Chelan Fresh is one of the largest fruit marketers in the state, selling much of the fruit grown from Chelan north to the Canadian border. It sells to retailers, wholesalers and importers worldwide.

It sells the fruit of: Chelan Fruit Cooperative, Chel-

an; Gebbers Farms, Brewster; Apple House, Pateros; Gold Digger Apples Inc., Oroville; and now Crane & Crane.

"We have been close friends with Crane & Crane for many years and we know the outstanding quality of their fruit and their people," Tom Riggan, president of Chelan Fresh, said in the news release.

Calif. rice plantings to increase only slightly from 2015

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Though many Northern California growers will get their full allocations of surface water this year, rice acreage statewide is expected to only slightly rise from 2015 levels, according to a government report.

Farmers in the Golden State intend to seed rice on 427,000 acres, 1 percent more than the acreage seeded last year, the National Agricultural Statistics Service forecast based on a survey conducted in March.

Medium-grain varieties will take up the lion's share of acreage at 390,000 acres, or 3 percent more than last year, according to NASS.

Reduced prices for some crops could determine how much rice goes into the ground, said Charley Mathews, a Marysville, Calif., grower and USA Rice Federation executive committee member.

"If we get excess rice acres," it could drag down prices, Mathews said. "It depends on the areas where they can grow alternative crops. Things like corn, safflower ... those prices are not all that great, I'm hearing, so the jury is still out on how many acres we're going to get."

Rice averaged \$370.48 per metric ton in March, down slightly from \$373.19 and continuing a downward trend from a peak of more than \$600 per metric ton in 2011 and 2012, according to the IndexMundi online data portal.

Meanwhile, the consulting firm AgResource predicts that hefty expected crops and poor U.S. exports could bring nationwide corn and wheat prices to 10-year lows this year, Reuters reports.

The reduced prices and continued uncertainty among water supplies are causing the Golden State's farmers to



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Worker Virgilio Chavez dumps a load of rice in a field just east of Willows, Calif., during the most recent harvest in October. Although Northern California growers will get their full federal water allocations, rice acreage in 2016 is expected to rise only slightly from last year.

remain conservative in their planting plans, the California Farm Bureau Federation reports.

The rice acreage predictions came amid a NASS prospective plantings report that predicts record low acreages of hay, oats and upland cotton. Among the other commodities, according to the NASS office in Sacramento:

- California growers expect to plant 440,000 acres

of corn in 2016, up 2 percent from last year.

- Growers plan to plant 45,000 acres of upland cotton this year, a record low. In addition, growers were seeding 165,000 acres of American Pima cotton, up 41 percent from last year.

- Producers intend to harvest half of all types from 1.16 million acres, down 2 percent from last year and also a record low.

- Acreage seeded in winter wheat is forecast at 400,000 acres in California, unchanged from last year, while 60,000 acres are seeded to Durum wheat, or 8 percent below last year's amount.

- Spring and sweet potato plantings will increase in 2016, according to the growers' survey.

Farmers expect to plant 26,000 acres of spring potatoes, up 13 percent from

last year, and 20,000 acres of sweet potatoes, up 8 percent from 2015.

- Sugar beet plantings will be steady compared to last year at 25,000 acres, while this year's anticipated 42,000 acres of sunflowers for oil would be up 27 percent from 2015.

In addition, growers expect to put in 1,400 acres of non-oil sunflowers, unchanged from last year.

Expert predicts severe stripe rust across Pacific Northwest

Growers urged to check fields, spray again if needed

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Stripe rust this year will be seen in most Pacific Northwest wheat-producing areas, a USDA expert predicts.

The fungus is to be expected in Western Oregon and Western Washington, said Xianming Chen, research plant geneticist for the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Pullman, Wash.

He was checking the Palouse

and Northern Idaho for rust this week. Stripe rust was already reported in Southern Idaho.

Across the United States, the fungus has been found in California, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, Mississippi, Virginia and South Dakota.

Chen said the disease's increased presence in the Northwest is due to a mild winter and warmer-than-average weather in February.

Increased heat and subsequent

cooling also speed up rust development, he said.

"The daily temperature is mostly in the 70s and in a few locations in the 80s — the night still is very cold," he said.

Most winter wheat fields were sprayed with fungicide when farmers applied herbicides, so Chen hopes the stripe rust will be reduced.

This year is still not as severe as 2010 and 2011, when infections were more widespread in the fall and overwintered, Chen said.

Chen recommends farmers

planting spring wheat choose highly resistant varieties.

Growers should also check their fields when the wheat emerges. If they find rust, they should apply fungicide with their herbicide applications.

Winter wheat farmers should check their fields three or four weeks after their first application to see if rust has started to develop. If it has, they should spray again, Chen said.

An organic hard red winter wheat field in Pendleton, Ore., had a severe infection, the most

uniform infection level seen in the area, Chen said.

Organic wheat farmers are limited in how they can treat for the disease, as most labeled chemicals are for conventional production.

The farmer applied a "biofungicide," but will have to wait for the wheat's adult plant resistance to kick in.

"Right now he does not have any option but to wait for the plants to grow and the weather to become warmer," Chen said, estimating the grower will see a 20 percent reduction in yield on that field.