

Apple commission to update export plan

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — The Washington Apple Commission has decided to update its five-year-old export promotion strategic plan to stay competitive globally.

The effort involves a collective, anonymous sharing of production and export volumes of fruit companies to examine sales trends and make sure the commission's export promotions align with industry needs.

At its May 19 meeting in Wenatchee, the commission discussed whether to wait until the next USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service fruit tree survey is done in 2017, but decided to forge ahead sooner, including its own tree survey to anticipate production trends.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Fuji apples are packed into a 40-pound boxes in December 2016 at Washington Fruit & Produce Co.'s packing plant in Yakima, Wash. The Washington Apple Commission has decided to update its 5-year-old export promotion strategic plan to stay competitive globally.

The commission had to push NASS in its last tree survey in 2011, Todd Fryhover, commission president, said.

"They had the largest grower unaccounted for until I got them to call," he said.

"We all know what we need to export by variety so to reconfirm a direction is more important than what we are growing," Fryhover said.

"We're losing market share in mature markets so

this is protecting ourselves," said Mark Zirkle, president of Zirkle and Rainier fruit companies, Selah.

"We're all competitive and we shouldn't have to share our manifests but as a group if we knew what we all had cumulatively it would be beneficial to all of us," said Cass Gebbers, president and CEO of Gebbers Farms, Brewster.

A lot of the information is being collected already for customers, he said.

Bob Mast, president of Columbia Marketing International, Wenatchee, voiced support and said a similar effort would be helpful in cherries.

Gebbers said Fryhover is adept at getting companies who are reluctant to participate to do so. Gebbers said the industry is flat and strategic planning helps it to be more proactive.

West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, said refreshed strategic planning gives direction to the Northwest Horticultural Council and U.S. Apple Association.

"It helps us recognize where we are in the industry life cycle. We've just come through peaks in exports. At some point in the future the Chinese will increase consumption, but it takes time," Mathison said.

Stemilt surveyed growers in Mattawa and Desert Aire and learned 3,000 acres has transitioned from row crops to tree fruit in the past five years and that another 5,000 is anticipated to switch in the next five years, Mathison said.

Smaller orchards north of Wenatchee are coming out and Mattawa continues to grow because terrain is flat-

ter and there's water, he said. Housing is an issue in Mattawa with only 300 beds put in the last five years, he said.

The state's apple acreage has remained near 160,000 for 10 years but production has increased because of high-density plantings and companies just getting a "whole lot better in growing fruit," said Dalton Thomas, president of Oneonta Starr Ranch Growers, Wenatchee.

Frank Davis, vice president of Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, said a survey of trees and acreage should be part of strategic planning but that a survey of production by boxes is a whole lot easier.

Fryhover said staff will start on the project with results aimed for a special meeting in the fall.

Spotted wing drosophila

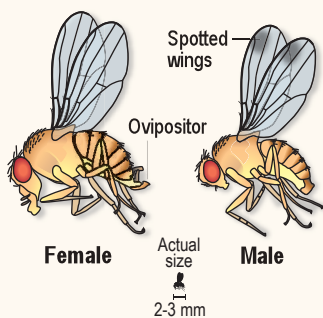
• A type of "vinegar fly", its ability to feed and lay eggs on ripening fruit makes it a significant threat to Pacific Northwest growers.

• Adult spotted wing drosophilas are small with red eyes and pale yellowish-brown bodies.

• Males have a dark spot on the tips of their wings. They also have two dark bands on their front legs.

• Females lack the distinctive dark spot on their wings. Look for a large, serrated ovipositor protruding from the abdomen.

• For more information on monitoring, preventative, cultural and chemical controls, go to: spottedwing.org



Sources: Oregon State University Extension Service

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Researchers attempting to understand spotted wing drosophila

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

Researchers around the Pacific Northwest continue to trap and try to better understand the spotted wing drosophila, an exotic fruit fly that attacks a wide variety of fruit crops.

The pest continues to be found wherever traps are set for it in southwestern Idaho, said University of Idaho entomologist Jim Barbour, superintendent of the Parma research station.

"We are finding (the) flies everywhere that we look for them, even in non-agricultural areas," he said. "They are surviving in the wild."

The pest, originally from Asia, was first detected in the United States in 2008 in California. It was found in Oregon and Washington the following year.

It was detected in Idaho in 2012 in small numbers and researchers initially doubted it could survive the state's harsh winters. Four years later, it is obvious the flies are over-wintering in Idaho, Barbour said.

"I think they are definitely here to stay," he said.

Barbour said researchers are attempting to better understand the insect's seasonal patterns "so we have a better idea where we need to focus our efforts."

He also wants to better understand their over-wintering biology, which could lead to being able to predict populations and emergence dates.

Elizabeth Beers, a Washington State University Extension

research entomologist, said the pest is not going away, and researchers are trying to develop control programs to help growers mitigate the harm.

"That ship sailed five years ago in the U.S.," she said about thoughts of eradicating the pest. "It's spread throughout the landscape in virtually all of the U.S. now and we're not going to eradicate it."

Unlike other fruit pests, SWD lay their eggs in healthy fruit still attached to plants, and they can quickly destroy soft fruit such as cherries, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, plums, peaches and grapes.

An infestation of about 25 percent in cherries can result in 100 percent crop loss, Beers said.

"If left uncontrolled, it can be very, very damaging," she said.

The pest has been detected in all of Washington's major cherry-growing districts, and it continues to be a problem for Oregon growers as well.

"It's something our ... fruit growers have to continue to deal with," said Bruce Pokarney, communications director for the Oregon Department of Agriculture. "We have considered it a pretty nasty thing for several years now."

WSU researchers continue to conduct trials to determine which insecticides effectively control the pest and have developed preliminary grower recommendations that can be found under the SWD section of the website, www.mount-vernon.wsu.edu, under "Special Projects."



Courtesy of Jaysa Fillmore

Casey Knudsen of Declo, Idaho, shows students how to be safe around large farm machinery.

Idaho FFA youths rewarded for outreach

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

FFA chapters in Cassia County, Idaho, have made an ag literacy event an annual happening for nearly 20 years, and their joint Ag Expo this year earned them recognition — and a \$1,500 grant.

The American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture just announced 10 winning schools around the country that competed in its My American Farm outreach program, awarding one to Cassia High School in Burley.

Cassia FFA Adviser Jaysa Fillmore applied for the grant on behalf of the Cassia, Burley, Declo and Oakley FFA chapters.

Outreach events have to target urban youths and include at least one aspect of the My American Farm ag literacy program, and the grant must be applied to a future ag literacy program. Students are also encouraged to bring in an industry expert to share their ag connection, Fillmore said.

Cassia County's four FFA chapters incorporated one of the program's learning activ-



Courtesy of Jaysa Fillmore

A third-grader plays Idaho Commodity Bingo.

ities — Garden in a Glove — into this year's Ag Expo and brought in a representative from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to talk about the agriculture-wildlife connection, she said.

They also showed episodes of "America's Heartland," which celebrates U.S. food production, and had 10 stations to teach third-grade students about agriculture — from growing crops and handling livestock to farm equipment and food processing.

Nearly 450 children visited the Expo this year, and the majority were from Burley

and live in town, she said.

It's become an event everyone talks about and looks forward to all year — the students and their teachers, as well as the FFA members, Fillmore said.

"We have high-schoolers who remember going to the Expo when they were in third grade," she said.

This year, it was bigger and held at the Cassia County Fairgrounds for the first time, allowing more children to attend and stay longer, she said.

"It was pretty awesome," she said.

The FFA chapters charged

Online

<http://myamericanfarm.org/>

\$1 per child to help cover costs. The grant might allow them to include additional grade levels in the Expo or help with busing costs to allow more schools to participate, she said.

Or they could each use their portion of the grant for other outreach projects, which benefit FFA members as well because they learn a great deal through teaching others about agriculture, she said.

The other ag advisers involved in the Expo were Jesse Miller of Declo, Troy Bird of Oakley and Sam Condie, Lex Godfrey and Casey Sanders of Burley.

Fillmore applied for the grant on a whim and winning it was "really neat," she said.

The grants are intended to help promote the Foundation's materials for promoting ag literacy, she said.

Other winners included the Elk Grove High School ag department of Elk Grove, Calif., and the Sonora High School FFA chapter of Sonora, Calif.

Despite drought, Calif. walnut acreage, tree sales jumped in 2015

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

RED BLUFF, Calif. — Four years of drought in California and a moderate price slide apparently haven't halted a trend of increasing walnut acreage and nursery sales.

California's estimated 360,000 overall acres in 2015 were up 12 percent from 2013 levels, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service in Sacramento. The Golden State's 300,000 bearing acreage during the most recent harvest was up from 290,000 acres in 2014, continuing an annual climb from the 218,000 acres that bore nuts in 2008, the



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

A walnut tree is shaken during harvest at Lindauer River Ranch in Red Bluff, Calif., in October. Walnut acreage in California increased 12 percent last year from 2013 levels.

agency reported.

Combined sales of walnut trees to California growers ac-

counted for 18,021 acres during the last crop year, according to a separate NASS report. That's

up from 17,076 acres of new trees in 2014 and 15,720 acres of first-year plantings in 2013, NASS observed.

"We've got a lot of nice, young orchards out there in the state," said Red Bluff, Calif., grower Tyler Christensen, who in recent years has doubled the size of his walnut orchard.

The growth comes even as farmers have had to manage orchards with limited water supplies in the past several years, getting by with such tools as drip irrigation and pressure chambers to determine a tree's water need. NASS' acreage report reflects the removal of about 7,000 acres of trees in the past two years, some of

which were harvested in 2015 before being pulled out.

One factor in the increasing walnut acreage is the plum orchards for prunes have been scaled back in recent years as a result of a loss of global market share, University of California advisers have said.

Another factor has been that tree nuts are more lucrative than many field crops, enabling growers to afford water prices that have skyrocketed during the drought. Nurseries have reported back orders of two years or longer for walnut trees.

NASS' acreage report was based on a survey of about 4,900 walnut growers. Of the

acreage reported, Chandler continued to be the leading variety with 104,450 bearing acres, followed by Hartley with 33,002 bearing acres. Chandler also accounted for 67 percent of the non-bearing acreage.

Growers harvested a record 575,000-ton crop last season despite the drought and a lack of chilling hours in the previous winter, NASS estimated. Producers have been experiencing their first protracted price slide in years, as the average price per pound to the grower dropped from \$2.05 in 2013 to an anticipated \$1.20 for the most recent crop.