

# PNW reps urge action on Columbia River Treaty



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

The Columbia River flows past cherry orchards south of Wenatchee, Wash. Pacific Northwest lawmakers are eager to have a treaty with Canada governing flood control and other issues renegotiated.

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

Five U.S. senators and 16 U.S. House members from the Pacific Northwest sent Secretary of State John Kerry a letter Aug. 11 urging the State Department to begin negotiations with Canada to modernize the Columbia River Treaty.

The State Department has stated it intended to start negotiations this year, but despite multiple letters from Congress urging it to do so and receiving regional recommendations almost three years ago, it has not,

said Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., part of the bipartisan group that signed the letter.

“Treaty modernization and negotiations with Canada directly affect the economy, environment and flood control needs of communities we represent,” the legislators wrote in the letter.

The State Department needs to conclude a review process, approve negotiation parameters, press Canada to appoint a lead negotiator and begin negotiations, the letter states.

The treaty was ratified in 1964 and has not been re-

vised since. Updating it will allow the U.S. and Canada to find new solutions for river management that could provide new opportunities for cooperation on critical clean energy solutions such as smart grids with intermittent power and grid-scale storage, the members said.

Regional recommendations include balancing ecosystem functions including salmon recovery, flood control and hydropower generation.

Senators who signed the letter are: Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, both D-Wash.; Ron Wyden and

Jeff Merkley, both D-Ore.; and Jon Tester, D-Mont.

House Republicans signing the letter are: Newhouse, Cathy McMorris-Rodgers, Jaime Herrera-Beutler and Dave Reichert, all of Washington; Greg Walden, Oregon; Mike Simpson, Idaho; and Ryan Zinke, Montana.

House Democrats signing are: Adam Smith, Denny Heck, Jim McDermott, Suzan DelBene, Derek Kilmer and Rick Larsen, all of Washington; Suzanne Bonamici, Earl Blumenauer, Peter De Fazio and Kurt Schrader, all of Oregon.

## Company forges ahead with GM apples

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

SUMMERLAND, B.C. — Okanagan Specialty Fruits will test market its first pre-commercial production of genetically modified Golden Delicious apples this fall and hopes to soon win USDA approval of GM Fuji apples.

The Summerland, B.C., company, which was bought out by Intrexon Corp. of Germantown, Md., in early 2015, received USDA and Canadian approval of GM Golden Delicious and Granny Smith apples at about the same time.

The GM Arctic brand Granny Smith is a bit behind in production but 1,000 to 1,200, 40-pound boxes of Arctic Golden Delicious will be sliced and sold in grocery stores in the western U.S. this fall, said Neal Carter, company founder and president.

“We’ve had a lot of interest from food service, grocery retailers, quick-serve restaurants, basically the whole gamut,” said Carter, who developed the apples by “silencing” a gene to prevent browning when sliced.

The company will grow, process and market the apples,



Courtesy of Okanagan Specialty Fruits

Neal Carter, founder and president of Okanagan Specialty Fruits and developer of genetically modified apples, holds a non-browning Gala apple. He will seek approval of a GM Gala next year.

focusing on packaging and sales of sliced apples. This fall’s market testing will help determine preferred packaging and pricing, Carter said.

The testing will be done with retailers in California, the Pacific Northwest and maybe in Texas and Colorado.

While details of a new U.S. GM labeling law are not clear, Carter said OSF will label Arctic products as genetically modified in the nutritional information area of packaging when regulations require it.

“Our biggest project right now is to ramp up production



Courtesy of Okanagan Specialty Fruits  
The Arctic Fuji, an apple genetically modified to reduce browning when sliced, has gained preliminary USDA approval. Other varieties already have.

as fast as we can,” Carter said.

The company has test blocks in undisclosed locations in Washington and New York. It planted 20,000 trees in Washington in 2015 and this spring increased that orchard to 85,000 trees, Carter said.

More than 300,000 trees have been budded for planting next spring and 500,000 are being budded for planting in 2018, he said.

The goal, he said, is to have 800 to 1,000 acres planted in the Northwest, about the same in the eastern U.S. and 600 to 800 acres in Canada by 2021.

The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service announced Aug. 10 that it has reached a preliminary decision to extend its determination of non-regulated status to OSF’s non-browning Arctic Fuji. APHIS also opened a 30-day public comment period on the petition.

APHIS and its Canadian counterpart have previously declared Arctic-brand GM apples safe for consumption and unaltered in nutritional value.

OSF expects action on the Fuji by the end of September or early October.

OSF will seek approval of an Arctic Gala next year.

While supportive of the science, the Washington apple industry opposed deregulation of the GM apples because it believes negative public perception could damage apple sales. Mark Powers, executive vice president of the Northwest Horticultural Council in Yakima, said that position hasn’t changed.

Prior to USDA approval of Arctic Golden Delicious and Granny Smith, the U.S. Apple Association expressed concern to USDA about the non-browning attribute being insufficient to risk possible market disruption.

But Jim Bair, U.S. Apple Association president and CEO, says USDA has no authority to withhold approval of a biotechnology food if there are no risks to consumers or the environment, as is the case with Arctic apples.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Chris Burlison of Burlison Fruit Stand in Dairyville, Calif., holds a half-flat of Bartlett pears from the farm’s orchard. California pear growers are in the midst of their harvest.

## Calif. pear harvest enters final stages

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

DAIRYVILLE, Calif. — In the orchards behind Burlison Fruit Stand, pickers are trotting out with fresh Bartlett and Asian pears, giving the proprietors hope for the future.

“Our trees are about two or three years old, so they’re just starting to produce,” Chris Burlison said.

The harvest of pears is in its final stages throughout California.

It started in the northern Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta region earlier this summer and has moved north, as farms in the other prime growing region — Lake and Mendocino counties — have been ramping up their harvest of the Bartlett variety, the California Farm Bureau Federation reports.

Epperson’s Family Farm in Montgomery Creek, Calif., was just getting started with what co-owner Theresa Epperson called “a pretty good crop” of Bartletts and other varieties as of Aug. 13.

“Everything’s about two weeks earlier this year,” she said.

Growers are picking a lighter crop overall, as the California Pear Advisory Board predicted this year’s fresh-market production to be 2.5 million 36-pound boxes, down 8 percent from the 2015 crop.

Total state production is expected to be 156,041 tons this year, down from 170,048 tons in 2015, the Farm Bureau reported.

Acreage and prices of pears have dropped in recent years

because of several factors, although growers believe the market has leveled off as demand from canners and packers has increased, the CFBF noted.

This year’s crop is lighter, partly because growers had to heavily prune their trees last year in response to a bacterial disease called fire blight, according to the organization.

Burlison said fire blight is especially tough on Asian pears.

“Quality-wise, the crop is good with a good range of sizes” this summer, said Chris Zanobini, executive director of the California Pear Advisory Board. “The harvest is going pretty smoothly. We’re probably going to finish up with Bartletts within two weeks, which is a little early.”

“The Bartlett crop is actually quite short,” he said. “We’re going to come up much shorter than our estimate.”

While drought has affected all of agriculture, most pears have had better access to water than some other crops because most of them are in the northern part of the state, Zanobini said. The Central Valley’s triple-dig-it afternoons don’t affect pears much, he said.

The harvest is usually mostly finished by Labor Day, although Zanobini said it could wrap up sooner this year.

One decision some growers face is whether to leave fruit on trees a few extra days to get more size, but a labor crunch will prompt some growers to pick their fruit when they have the labor available, he said.

## AgroFresh expands its apple, pear service centers

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

AgroFresh Solutions Inc., a provider of produce freshness solutions, has opened two new service centers and hired 50 more seasonal workers worldwide to serve more apple and pear growers with products to keep fruit fresh.

The new centers, in Sparta, Mich., and Bologna, Italy, expand the company’s in-field customer support presence.

The company, headquartered in Collegeville, Pa., already operates service centers in Yakima, Wash., Curico, Chile, and Lleida,

Spain. It also has a technical center, the hub of its orchard research and development efforts with support service, in Wenatchee, Wash.

“Our service centers are logistical focal points for coordinating product supplies and application services,” said Edgardo Castaneda, AgroFresh vice president of operations.

The new centers will help the company assist customers more effectively in the upcoming season, he said.

AgroFresh sells pre-harvest Harvista and post-harvest SmartFresh, both using 1-Methylcyclopropene (1-MCP), a synthetic molecule

developed for fruit applications 20 years ago by USDA ARS research scientist Jim Mattheis in Wenatchee. 1-MCP slows the ripening of apples and pears to keep them fresher longer in storage. That’s done by SmartFresh.

Harvista is a pre-harvest application that slows fruit maturation to help growers manage harvest timing.


Earlier this year, AgroFresh announced it was adding 48 more tractor-pulled ground sprayers to its fleet in the U.S. to help growers apply Harvista to up to 20,000 more acres. Growers also apply it by helicopter.

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