

# Red Delicious volume up, prices falling

By **DAN WHEAT**  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Wholesale prices of Washington Red Delicious apples are softening as their volume grows, while other varieties have dropped in volume since an Aug. 1 forecast and their prices are holding.

The fresh crop was estimated by the industry at 137.4 million, 40-pound boxes on Nov. 1, up 3.4 percent from the Aug. 1 forecast of 132.9 million boxes. It's the second largest apple crop in state history.

While New York's and Mexico's crops are now less than previously thought, large crops remain in Michigan, Canada, Europe and China and pose competition, said Desmond O'Rourke, a private consultant and retired Washington State University agriculture economics professor in Pullman.

Washington's harvest is wrapping up with a few late Cripps Pink.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Red Delicious apples are packed at Valicoff Fruit Co. in Wapato, Wash. Wholesale prices of Washington Red Delicious apples are softening as their volume grows.

While USDA tracking of Washington apple prices shows them holding, the price of Red Delicious already has slipped to \$16.82 per box and most varieties will probably be down \$1.50 to \$2 per box this season over last season, O'Rourke said. USDA showed Reds at \$24 to \$26 per box on Oct. 7.

Prices will be lower this year but not as bad as two

years ago when, with a record 143-million-box crop, they tumbled and Reds ended up around \$8 to \$9 per box, O'Rourke said.

Tom Riggan, general manager of Chelan Fresh Marketing in Chelan, said Gala prices probably will be \$2 lower per box than last year but that vintage size and quality will keep prices from falling too far.

"Apples didn't get the heat

stress that they did in 2015. We had near perfect growing conditions and that's given us better color, better size and the best levels of sugar, starch and acids that we've had in a number of years that make for better long-term storage," Riggan said.

Fruit maturity can change rapidly on the tree but this year was consistent at harvest, he said.

Fruit is of good medium size to slightly larger, running 80 to 72 apples per box, which is great for domestic retail while smaller sizes are desired for some export, he said. Still there's plenty of fruit for export, he said.

"All varieties look good and are very manageable. We don't want too few or too many," Riggan said. "We will feel the most pressure on Reds because there's so many."

Red Delicious are estimated by the Washington State Tree Fruit Association at 39.1 million boxes, up from 33.7 million on Aug. 1. That's a big jump and why their prices are

slipping, O'Rourke said.

Likely 50 percent of Reds will be exported, maybe more, Riggan said.

"Reds are in good condition and shape, what we call type. Nice appearance and shape and condition," he said.

Most marketers are pushing them early to create export momentum and once consumers taste the quality it will build demand, he said.

Large crops in Europe are resulting in French Gala competing with Washington apples in Central America and Southeast Asia where normally they're not seen and Italian Reds competing with Washington Red in Europe, Riggan said.

As of Nov. 1, 22.375 million boxes of apples have been shipped, or 16.3 percent of the crop versus 17 percent of the crop last year at this time and 16.6 percent two years ago, Riggan said.

"Reds are the only thing taking a beating (on price) for awhile," he said. "Everything else seems to be OK so I feel pretty optimistic."



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Irrigation water flows by a mint field in the Treasure Valley of southwestern Idaho on Aug. 16. The Idaho Water Resource Board has approved \$200,000 to study the possibility of using surplus water to address aquifer stabilization and water sustainability issues in the region.

## \$200,000 OK'd for Treasure Valley aquifer recharge study

By **SEAN ELLIS**  
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Water Resource Board has approved \$200,000 for a Treasure Valley aquifer recharge feasibility study.

The money will be used by the Idaho Department of Water Resources to assess the possibility of using surplus water to address aquifer stabilization and sustainability issues in the Treasure Valley of southwestern Idaho.

A lot of studying of water and aquifer issues in the Treasure Valley has already been done, said Wesley Hipke, IDWR's recharge project manager.

But this study "will bring it all together to show how much water is available, where it is available and when it is available," he said.

Hipke said there are a lot of thoughts and ideas about where recharge efforts might or might not work in the valley, "but I've not seen a lot of data to back that up. That's the intent of the study."

Hipke said he is a strong proponent of recharge — "I think it's an extremely effective water management tool" — but water managers need to know a few main things before proceeding with any recharge efforts in the Treasure Valley.

That includes how much surplus water exists, whether there are places recharge will work to build the aquifer up and whether the surplus water can get to those places.

"Let's get some good, solid data on how much water is available, where it's available and when it's available," Hipke said. "That's what this study is looking at."

There are about 8,000 farms in the Treasure Valley area, almost a third of the state's total farms.

Hipke said the study will rank the top areas for doing recharge and determine what it will take and how much it will cost to develop the necessary infrastructure.

He expects work on the study to begin within five months and take about a year to complete.

Two Senate concurrent resolutions passed by the Idaho Legislature this year supported efforts to stabilize the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, including earnestly developing the capacity to recharge 250,000 acre-feet of water into that aquifer annually.

A third Senate resolution directed the water board to implement aquifer stabilization projects in other parts of the state.

Much of the state's focus on aquifer recharge efforts has been in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, but "the ESPA is not the only place in the state that is having water struggles" and it's important to address those other aquifers as well, said Sen. Steve Bair, the retired Blackfoot farmer who introduced the resolutions.

The Treasure Valley aquifer is a complicated one with fluctuating water table levels, Bair said.

"We have to spend the money to get those studies under our belt so we fully understand how that aquifer functions," he said.

## Trade, regulatory reform top priorities for cattlemen

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**  
Capital Press

SUN VALLEY, Idaho — Cattle producers have many obstacles, and it's important to set priorities today with a vision for tomorrow, according to the top hand at National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

"A lot of people don't like what I do. They want cattle off the land and beef off the plate," said NCBA President Tracy Brunner during the Idaho Cattle Association annual convention.

International trade and the passage of the Trans-Pacific Partnership remain top priorities for the industry. Brunner said the reason trade is so important is because about 14 percent of beef revenue, and \$300 per calf, comes from the value of exports.

TPP passage is important because Australia has already negotiated a bilateral agreement with Japan, giving it an 11 percent tariff advantage over U.S. beef. President-elect Donald Trump's strong opposition to TPP will make things challenging, he said.

"I don't believe it's necessarily dead, but it's going to be difficult going forward," Brunner said.

EPA regulations are another top priority for the industry. NCBA has expended a lot of capital over the past couple of years fighting the agency's Waters of the U.S. rule, which he described as an overreach no one wanted or intended.

"I think we're going to be able to put an end to this by the end of the year" — and if not in an omnibus bill, by the next Congress, he said.

The Endangered Species Act is another top concern that he said has severely restricted private property rights across the U.S.

"NCBA believes it's time to rewrite the whole thing. I believe we have an opportunity to put an end to the threat sage grouse has (on the industry) by the end of the year," he said.



Courtesy of Washington State Department of Agriculture

Washington State Potato Commission marketing director Ryan Holterhoff talks to merchants in Myanmar during a federally funded trade mission in November. The potato commission sought to lay the groundwork for selling Washington potatoes to the Southeast Asian country emerging from economic isolation.

# Washington potato growers pay another call on Southeast Asia

## U.S. spud consumption flat, so attention turns overseas

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

The Washington State Potato Commission's latest trade mission to Southeast Asia focused on customer relations in Vietnam and potato chips in Myanmar.

A delegation that included the state Department of Agriculture spent three days in each country between Nov. 6 and 12. The potato commission has undertaken several Asia trade missions in recent years, including a trip two years ago that included stops in Vietnam and Myanmar.

With the National Potato Council reporting that per capita consumption of potatoes has flattened in the U.S., potato growers are looking overseas for customers.

"The international market is more and more important for the potato industry in Washington," said Ryan Holterhoff, the potato commission's director of marketing and industry affairs. "That's where the growth is."

The commission received a USDA grant of \$42,776 to promote fresh potato products. Before the trade mission, the commission shipped about 250 pounds of Washington potatoes to be made into

potato chips by Myanmar processors.

Holterhoff said the commission hoped to impress the processors with the quality of Washington spuds.

"The verdict is there's definitely interest," he said.

The next step may be to send a shipment of 25 million metric tons of potatoes for processors to test, Holterhoff said.

There are logistical problems, such as whether Myanmar has the refrigerated trucks and warehouses to transport and store potatoes in the hot, humid climate, he said.

Washington's shipment of free potatoes is a long-term investment that may take 5 to 10 years to mature, Holterhoff said. "I think our next step is still looking at taking more baby steps," he said.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, represents a new market.

The country has 53 million people, but the per capita income of \$1,280 is the second-lowest in East and Southeast Asia, according to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

The country has only recently emerged from economic isolation. President Barack Obama signed an executive order in October lifting trade sanctions imposed in 1989 because of human-rights abuses.

Quincy potato grower Melva Calloway, a trade delegation member, said she sees huge potential in Myanmar eventually.

# Organic apple grower inspired at Tilth conference

By **DAN WHEAT**  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Steve Cole intends to devote more time to his orchard in the Greenbluff district northeast of Spokane since he recently retired from his day job as a physical therapist.

As owner of the only certified organic tree fruit orchard in Spokane County, Cole says he was inspired to pay more attention to his soil at the state's annual Tilth Conference at the Wenatchee Convention Center, Nov. 11-13.

Cole was among 450 at-

tendees who listened to keynote speaker Michael Phillips, a New Hampshire apple grower and author of "The Holistic Orchard," talk about biological resiliency and soil health.

"I probably use a little more of the chemicals allowed in the organic program and he's trying to find alternatives to that," Cole said. "His emphasis is on growing the soil to make trees healthy. That's something I need to focus on myself."

Phillips talked about using cover crops and other means to strengthen roots and leaves

to ward off pests and disease.

Cole, 64, said he's eager to try that with his 17 varieties of apple trees, pears, apricots, prunes, peaches and cherries on his 5 acres.

About 55 attendees visited Kyle Mathison's organic orchard south of Wenatchee, Stemilt Growers packing plant in Wenatchee and Gibbs organic orchard near Leavenworth. Later Phillips toured Cole's orchard and other organic orchards in Kettle Falls, Yakima and Onalaska.

"It's amazing the fruit that's out here and how there are challenges on pest and dis-

ease but different from what I do," Phillips said.

"They have a whole different set of insects and disease that we don't have. So I think he's a little jealous of us in that we live in an area more conducive to organic growing," Cole said.

The conference was attended by small growers and researchers, students and agricultural professionals, mostly from Washington but also surrounding states, interested in sustainable agriculture built on ecological principles.

The conference featured 36 vendors and 28 workshops

on topics ranging from renewable energy to livestock, organic certification, ecological pest and disease management, policy, economics and marketing.

Washington's tilth movement began at an ecological agriculture conference in Ellensburg in 1974.

The conference was sponsored by Seattle Tilth, which has merged with Tilth Producers of Washington and Cascade Harvest Coalition. The organization's new name will be announced in January and next fall's conference will be held in Vancouver.