



Washington State University
An apple shows apple maggot dimpling. Infected fruit becomes uglier as the worm works.

WSDA to expand its apple maggot rule

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Department of Agriculture is working to expand its apple maggot quarantine rule to include the potted soil of host plants.

The department posted a notice Nov. 14 that it started a rule amendment process. No draft is ready yet nor public comment period set. Jim Marra, pest program manager of the department’s plant protection division, said he doesn’t anticipate any amendment going into effect until late 2018 or early 2019. A Small Business Economic Impact Statement has to be completed first and that can take time, he said.

Apple maggot, also known as a railroad worm, is a pest of several fruits, mainly apples. It has long been active on the East Coast but was discovered in Portland in 1979. It’s been active in western Oregon and Washington and slowly spread east of the Cascades as a low-level problem in backyard fruit trees and has never been detected in commercially packed fruit.

The department and Washington State Tree Fruit Association want to keep it that way.

“Our big concern is big box stores. If plants are coming in there that have produced fruit or are fruiting,” said Ranie Haas, director of regulatory and industry affairs for the association

in Yakima.

In a July 17 letter to Marra, Haas said failure to control apple maggot would require growers to increase costly pesticide applications to prevent crop loss. Lack of adequate control also jeopardizes access to foreign markets for the fruit, she said. Potted nursery trees and their soil are potential pathways for spread of apple maggot, she said.

The current rule requires inspection and certification of apples, crab apples, hawthorn, apricots, cherries, plums, prunes and quince, but not commercial pears, as pest-free before being sold if an apple maggot fly is found within half a mile of an orchard. If fruit is infested it must undergo cold storage and treatment before exporting.

Homegrown or foraged fruit cannot be moved from a quarantine area into or through a pest-free area. Quarantined areas include all of Western Washington, the western half of Chelan County, Kittitas County, the western and northern two-thirds of Yakima County, Klickitat County, the southeastern portion of Lincoln County and Spokane County.

In 2016, the rule was amended to require composting companies to treat municipal yard waste to kill apple maggots before trucking material into apple-growing regions for processing.

WAWG president follows family legacy of leadership



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
Fairfield, Wash., wheat farmer Marci Green at her home on Dec. 13.

Green wants to preserve crop insurance, tax incentives, trade for farmers

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

FAIRFIELD, Wash. — Leadership runs in Marci Green’s family.

Her father, Karl Felgenhauer, was a longtime board member of the Washington Wheat Commission, now the Washington Grain Commission. Her great uncle, Jack Felgenhauer, was a president of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

Green has also served on local boards and other organizations.

“I just feel like it’s important to take part in the things you are involved with,” she said.

In November, Green took over as president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers. She will serve a year-long term.

Green believes the organization has established itself well with lawmakers in Olympia and Washington, D.C.

“When we walk into offices ... we don’t have to do as much educating,” she said. “They’ve seen us before, they know why we’re there. So we can get right down to what it is that we need, and the specifics.”

Green and her husband, Lonnie, started working on the farm for her father in 1987, and began buying into the farm in 1990. Green is a sixth-generation farmer; sons Jordan and Derek, 25 and 22, are seventh-generation farmers. Jordan is back on the farm; Derek is finishing his senior year at the University of Idaho and plans to be back on the farm in May.

State priorities are protecting agricultural tax incentives, addressing the state Supreme Court’s 2016 Hirst ruling that is “hampering rural development” and passing a capital budget, including funding for several Washington State University buildings.

WDFW pens \$425,000 contract extension with wolf consultant

Contract with Madden totals \$1.6 million

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

By mid-2019, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will have paid a consultant up to \$1.6 million over four years to help it reconcile conflicting views on wolves, according to the consultant’s contract.

Francine Madden, who has led meetings of the department’s Wolf Advisory Group since 2015, has signed a two-year \$425,000 extension, adding to the nearly \$1.2 million in her previous contract.

WDFW wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said the department will continue to lean on Madden to forge agreements among interest groups and to train department employees to resolve conflicts.

Under Madden’s guidance, the advisory group for two straight grazing seasons has agreed on a policy related to protecting livestock and culling wolfpacks. “We’ve seen cohesion on one of the most challenging aspects of wolf management,” Martorello said.

WDFW hired Madden, founder of Human-Wildlife Conflict Collaboration, three years ago to assess the social conflict over Washington’s growing wolf population. She subsequently was hired to lead the Wolf Advisory Group. The department said it needed the expertise of a neutral facilitator to have any hopes of having the group agree on policies.

Her job, according to the new contract, is to bring



Don Jenkins/Capital Press File
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife consultant Francine Madden points to ideas from the department’s Wolf Advisory Group at a meeting. The department has extended her contract for two more years.

about a “social system alignment to support and improve the likelihood of long-term capacity, empowerment and effective decision-making around wolf conservation and management.”

She is paid \$400 a hour to consult by phone and \$8,000 a day to lead meetings in person. The contract also includes travel expenses.

The Cattle Producers of Washington, whose members include ranchers directly affected by the return of wolves, withdrew from the Wolf Advisory Group in 2015. The organization has no interest in rejoining, Cattle Producers President Scott Nielsen said Tuesday.

WDFW has used the advisory group to avoid taking responsibility for managing wolves, he said.

“Our position has been and still is that wolves should be managed scientifically, not socially. I view the (advisory

group) as social management, and I don’t think anybody disagrees with that,” Nielsen said. “The best thing for us is to not be there.”

Efforts to reach Madden for this story were not successful.

Madden has won support from state Rep. Joel Kretz, R-Wauconda. Kretz, whose district includes most of the state’s wolves, said that before Madden the Wolf Advisory Group’s policies were strongly tilted toward urban viewpoints.

“And we got out of it a really bad wolf plan,” he said. “The only progress I’ve seen with the (advisory group) has been since she’s been on it.

“I think she’s been real effective,” Kretz said. “When you look at Francine and the cost (of her services), what’s the cost of what we’ve been doing? What’s the cost for the ranchers?”

Before Madden, Wolf Ad-

visory Group meetings were contentious, said group member Diane Gallegos, executive director Wolf Haven International, a wolf sanctuary in Tenino.

“We didn’t have the expertise that Francine brings to communicate with each other,” Gallegos said. “We needed the neutral person to break down the walls and make us human beings again.

“I am so grateful that the department acknowledged that it needed help with this,” Gallegos said.

Several environmental groups are represented on the advisory group. Two that are not, the Center for Biological Diversity and Cascadia Wildlands, are suing WDFW. The lawsuit claims the advisory group has provided “political cover” for killing wolves without proper scientific review or public comment. The suit is pending in Thurston County Superior Court.

Researchers focus on listeria contamination

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — The recall of Michigan apples in Midwest and Southeastern states due to listeria contamination fears is unfortunate, and the Washington apple industry is working hard to avoid similar problems, a leading researcher says.

Grocery chains Kroger and Aldi have recalled several varieties of apples sold in several states since Dec. 12 after routine sampling by Jack Brown Produce, Sparta, Mich., found listeria in a shipment from one of its suppliers, Nyblad Orchards. No illnesses were reported, but both retailers advised people to throw apples away or return them for full refunds.

Listeria monocytogenes is a species of pathogenic bacteria that can cause serious or fatal infections in young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems as well as miscarriages and stillbirths in pregnant women, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In otherwise healthy people, it can cause high fever, severe head-



Dan Wheat/Capital Press
Ines Hanrahan, post-harvest physiologist, Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission.

ache, stiffness, nausea, abdominal pain and diarrhea.

“We don’t know a lot of details about what happened in Michigan but it is unfortunate. We are very concerned in Washington about listeria and have been trying to do everything possible to set up processes to avoid problems,” said Ines Hanrahan, post harvest physiologist and project manager with the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission.

Not all listeria strains or species are deadly and where

they live and what causes them to grow is not fully understood, Hanrahan said.

“We have no way of controlling or knowing when a potentially deadly strain enters our post-harvest environment,” she said. “However, we can set up very thorough systems to make sure we get alerted as soon as any listeria enters storage and packing and then we can eradicate them by thorough cleaning and sanitation programs for equipment.”

Furthermore, fruit is sprayed with chemicals that kill bacteria such as listeria and E. coli, she said. Ongoing research funded by the commission in collaboration with Washington State University has established that cold storage or controlled atmosphere storage of more than six weeks may reduce listeria species by up to 99.9 percent, she said.

Adding a continuous flow ozone generator to a controlled atmosphere storage room may lead to even higher levels of bacterial die-off, she said.

“We are currently conducting research to find out the best standard operating procedures for all these things to get the maximum bacterial reduction.

We know these techniques work but we are trying to get the maximum effect,” Hanrahan said.

Hanrahan and scientists at WSU and the Center for Produce Safety in Davis, Calif., are working on studies, two of which will be done next year and others within three years.

Listeria is no more common in apples than other produce or processed foods. There was a rash of listeria outbreaks in cantaloupe several years ago in which more than two dozen people died. Outbreaks have also occurred in ice cream and cheese.

Any food that comes in contact with soil has potential for contamination, as does produce in which water is used in packing lines, Hanrahan said.

In late 2014 and early 2015, three deaths and 34 hospitalizations across the country were traced to caramel apples sold by three companies but originating as fresh apples from Bakersfield, Calif. In 2013, Crunch Pak, Cashmere, Wash., recalled sliced apples due to possible listeria contamination.

Listeria infections cause about 1,600 illnesses and 260 deaths annually in the U.S.

Input price declines can’t make up for low crop prices

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

CALDWELL, Idaho — As farm commodity prices have declined over the past three years, many farm input costs have fallen as well — but at a slower rate.

Farmers’ profit margins are getting tighter, University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Ben Eborn said during UI’s recent ag outlook forums. To survive, farmers need to look for every opportunity to increase efficiencies, even if it’s in small increments.

“It’s going to take small, 1-2 percent improvements to lots of things, like fertilizing, irrigating, labor and feed,” he said. “Every category has to improve a little bit in order

to stay profitable. You’re not going to be able to find one silver bullet to keep you in the black.”

Farmers, he said, must be diligent.

“The best thing you can do is monitor your costs and financial records like a hawk,” Eborn said.

Eborn estimates that in 2018 fertilizer costs will remain steady with 2017, chemicals and pesticides will be steady to 1-2 percent lower, custom farming will remain steady to 1-3 percent higher and irrigation costs will increase 2-5 percent.

He said the best time to purchase fuel is late December into January and producers should shop around to make sure they’re getting the best

possible deal on fertilizer and chemicals.

He also said producers should consider leasing equipment right now. “They can save a lot of money doing that.”

According to USDA data, average U.S. farm production expenditures declined from about \$190,000 per farm in 2014 to about \$165,000 in 2016.

But those declining costs haven’t been enough to offset declining crop prices for most farmers, Eborn said.

Costs “have gone down a little but they haven’t gone down as much as we’d like,” said Shelley farmer Stan Searle.

Searle said fertilizer prices were down in 2017 but he pur-

chased more fertilizer to try to increase his yields to make up for lower crop prices.

His advise to fellow farmers is to focus on hitting the market highs.

“The marketing of your crops is probably going to be the biggest profit margin maker for you,” he said. “Hit the market highs while they’re there (because) they won’t be there for long.”

Parma farmer Mike Goodson said fertilizer prices “have come down quite a bit but not as fast as commodity prices are falling” and “labor is up quite a bit. Margins are pretty slim if not just break-even right now.”

To manage, Goodson is looking to reduce the cost of some inputs that are providing only marginal yield gains.