

Little Cherry Disease at 'epidemic levels'

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

PROSSER, Wash. — Two of three strains of Little Cherry Disease "are well into epidemic levels" in cherry orchards throughout Central Washington and if they keep spreading eventually will impact the crop, a Washington State University plant virologist says.

"What I mean by epidemic levels is that it's high enough that it's not easily controllable, when it gets above 10 percent of an orchard," said Scott Harper, virologist and director of Clean Plant Center Northwest at the WSU Irrigated Agriculture Research and Extension Center in Prosser.

The past year has been bad for the spread of LCD with most cherry orchards now having it to some degree or "if not they soon will," Harper said.

Infestations range from a few scattered trees often on orchard edges, indicative of vector spread from the outside, to 100 percent of an orchard in heavily hit areas, he said.

The only way to control it appears to be tearing out infected trees and those around them and not replanting for more than a year. The main saving grace is that it spreads slowly.

B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers, the industry's promotional arm in Yakima, said LCD is close behind labor and loss of the Chinese market as critical grower concerns.

"Some growers cut out the infected trees and some have simply pulled whole blocks (sections of orchards) and have started over," Thurlby said.

No one is tracking acres of yanked trees but a couple years ago it was known to be over 1,000. There were 42,198 acres of cherries in the state in January 2017, according to USDA NASS. Planting has been expanding at 42 percent annually since 2000, Thurlby said.

LCD has no cure and robs trees of energy, reduces production and results in small fruit that's unmarketable.

Little Cherry Virus 1 and 2 take away fruit flavor and Western X Phytoplasma is a bacterial-like strain that leaves bitter-tasting fruit. All three pathogens overwinter in roots and spreads tree-to-tree in roots. Apple and grape mealybugs spread virus 2, the



Dan Wheat/Capital Press File

Good Sweetheart cherries are shown at top. The smaller, lighter cherries at bottom have Little Cherry Disease in this 2014 photo taken at Kyle Mathison Orchards on Wenatchee Heights, Wash.

dominant pathogen, and 2016 studies show leafhoppers carry Western X.

Bugs can be sprayed but the best control is tree removal, scientists say.

Virus 1 is rare perhaps due to the absence of an insect vector, Harper said.

Western X has been found in peaches and nectarines, he said.

In 1933, LCD all but wiped out the British Columbia cherry industry and 90 percent of trees were removed, Tim Smith, WSU Extension pathologist emeritus, has said. British Columbia experienced another serious episode in the 1970s. LCD was detected in Washington in the 1930s but was dormant until wet, cool springs may have contributed to an initial rise in the Wenatchee area around 2009.

From September 2017 through September 2018, the virus diagnostic laboratory at WSU-IAREC received more than 1,500 samples of tree leaves and wood to test, Harper said.

Of those, 24 percent had Western X, 15 percent had virus 2, less than 1 percent had virus 1 and 60 percent had no LCD, he said.

Western X was dominant in the southern counties of Yakima, Benton and Franklin and virus 2 dominated in the north-

ern counties of Grant, Chelan and Okanogan, Harper said. This may be due to different vector compositions or geographic barriers, he said.

County percentages of Western X, V-2 and nothing found: Yakima, 58, 2, 40; Benton, 91, 0, 9; Franklin, 79, 0, 21; Grant, 25, 38, 37; Chelan, 8, 18, 74; Okanogan, 1, 56, 43.

Harper is in the final stages of testing a real time Polymerase Chain Reaction testing more sensitive to lower amounts of infection in leaves and tree tissue to detect disease before symptoms show at harvest so removal can occur earlier.

Western X has occurred in young trees with no known nearby infestations. Harper has studied weeds and other nearby plants looking for hosts but has found less than 1 percent with Western X.

"There are no easy or painless ways of dealing with this disease," Harper said. "It will take a concerted approach of vector management, removal of infected trees and replacement from pathogen-free sources. It also takes close work with neighbors because LCD doesn't respect boundary lines."

Wild horse roundup completed in SE Oregon

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

More than 800 wild horses were recently rounded up in southeast Oregon by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management as part of a sterilization project to control their population.

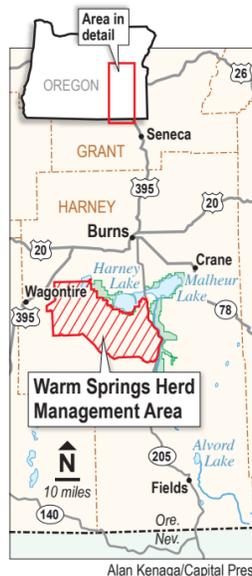
The BLM conducted the wild horse gather Oct. 2-23, during which time the agency rounded up 846 horses, 41 burros and two mules, leaving roughly 20-30 horses in the Warm Springs Herd Management Area, said Tara Thissell, public affairs specialist for the agency.

"We are overpopulated on the range for sure," Thissell said.

The agency plans to return 200 horses to the range, with the ovaries removed from half the female population and the other half being left intact as a control group, she said.

A portion of the mares and stallions will be outfitted with tracking collars.

The two populations that will be returned to the range are part of the "behavioral and spatial ecology portion of the study," which will also sterilize additional mares that will remain in captivity so the rate of medical complications can be analyzed,



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Thissell said.

Thissell noted the project is supported by the American Association of Equine Practitioners, which wants to see whether ovary removal from wild mares is a "viable population management tool."

Wild horses are controversial on the range, as ranchers often blame them for causing environmental damage that's blamed on livestock or that justifies grazing curtailments.

Before the roundup was even finished, however, the BLM's project was chal-

lenged in federal court by the Friends of Animals, a non-profit advocacy group based in New York that calls it an "unethical and ill-informed experiment."

The plaintiff complains that separating the two study populations with a fence will create a "zoo-like herd management area" without first conducting sufficient analysis and public participation as required under the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

Friends of Animals notes that testing conducted between 2001 and 2010 found genetic diversity in the herd had declined and claims that BLM doesn't plan to conduct additional environmental assessments each time it conducts roundups as part of the 10-year management project contrary to NEPA.

Removing ovaries is characterized in the complaint as a "dangerous surgery" that will leave mares "highly traumatized" and will adversely affect their health over the long term.

The lawsuit seeks an injunction against the sterilization experiment and 10-year management plan for the wild horses as well as reimbursement of the plaintiff's litigation costs.

Tilth conference looks to boost different voices

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The Tilth Alliance wants to help more voices be heard in agriculture.

The Tilth Conference is Nov. 9-11 at the Davenport Grand Hotel in Spokane, Wash.

California grain farmer Mai Nguyen will deliver the keynote address.

The conference committee wanted to bring out the farmer perspective, but make space for new voices to share their experiences, said Erin Murphy, education coordinator for the Alliance.

"People wanted a farmer," Murphy said. "Folks are really interested in having a keynote speaker that tells a different story. Mai is an activist for racial equity, a female and a person of color."

Audra Mulhern, executive producer and host of the in-development documentary, "Women's Work: the untold story of America's female farmers" and founder of the documentary project, "The Female Farmer Project," will deliver the capnote address.

"She's local, she's from Washington state," Murphy said. "It's a really cool way to have someone that's super-involved in agriculture and very well-known nationally. Just the work she's doing is really awesome."

The conference includes sessions for various aspects of farming: production, marketing, finances, regulations and certifications and increasing diversity in farming.

"We're really trying to make space to have that

storytelling and have folks say, 'Hey, we're all farmers,' but no two farmers' experience is exactly the same," Murphy said. The idea is to have "those opportunities to converse and for people to network and learn from one another."

Many farmers are considering seeds as a way to diversify their farms and markets, she said. The conference offers several topics about seed production.

A session on and mental health has also generated some excitement, she said.

"Mental health is so important ... when you're farming and so focused on getting things done, your overwhelming to-do list, it's just really important to remember to practice self-care both physically and mentally," she said.

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Presented by **Tires LES SCHWAB**

Item/description	Ore.	Wash.	Idaho	Calif.
• Days suitable for fieldwork (As of Oct. 30)	6.2	5.5	5.9	7
• Topsoil moisture, surplus	0	1%	1%	0
• Topsoil moisture, percent short	77%	50%	33%	80%
• Subsoil moisture, surplus	0	1%	2%	0
• Subsoil moisture, percent short	89%	51%	52%	80%
• Precipitation probability (6-10 day outlook as of Oct. 30)	33-60% Below	33% Below	33% Below/ 33% Above	40-60% Below/ Normal (South)

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