

Host of Problems Facing Valley Orchardists Demonstrated During County's Second Annual Orchard Tour and Field Day

Orchard Heating, Insect Pests Among Discussion Topics

Sponsored by State And County Groups

The host of problems which face valley orchardists became abundantly evident recently, during the second annual Orchard Tour and Field day, conducted under the joint sponsorship of the Jackson County Fruit Growers league and the State Horticultural society.

The problems range from cold weather during budding season in the pear orchards, and what to do about it, to the recent invasion of tiny insects known as Pear Psylla, and how to combat them.

The first of these problems is a headache, for not only is orchard heating expensive under any circumstances, it is also a major public relations hazard as, every spring, housewives and merchants get madder and madder at the sooty smudge.

Problem Unsolved

What can be done, however, is still not solved. Experiments with "smokeless" heaters, which throw out less black soot, have been made with some success, but the smokeless type cost considerably more than do the old smudge pots with which orchards are equipped. It would require an investment running into thousands of dollars for each acre of orchard land to convert to them. Storage, too, is a problem, for the heaters, which have stacks, cannot be stacked row on row the way the simpler and less expensive pots can be stored.

This year experiments in the motion of air were tried. One big installation was at Klamath orchards, where a tall tower mounting two big propellers makes a circle each 12 minutes. It helps—bringing temperatures up a few degrees—but only in a strictly limited radius. To prove effective, many of the expensive machines would be needed.

The situation here, particularly on flat bottom-land, is different than in California, where hills, and a usual layer of warm air above make the machines much more effective.

The 100 or so fruit growers and farmers on the recent tour visited the Klamath orchard, and inspected varying fruit damage resulting from the late-season cold snap, on June 12, when most heater-pots had been removed from orchards.

From there the group went to the Medford branch of the OSC experiment station, where Dr. Elliott Degman, superintendent, explained a series of experiments which have been conducted with various sprays for different purposes, including those which prevent fruit from falling from trees before they are ripe.

At the station, viewers saw two plots, one of which had been treated with a new soil conditioner, and one which had not. Many found it difficult to tell them apart, and the conclusion was that no decision on its worth can yet be made.

The use of sawdust as a mulch and moisture-holder was shown at the next stop, the orchard of Chris Wolff south of Medford. This procedure too is still largely experimental, although more and more orchardists are trying it. The sawdust can be applied in various depths, serving to break up the soil, and to hold moisture in it without drying out. Sawdust is in some ways more efficient than the use of cover crops.

The longest and most interesting stop was at the Talent branch experiment station, where Dr. Degman, Dr. L. G. Gentner, entomologist, and Prof. Henry Hartman, of Oregon State college, told of experimental work designed to protect trees, and to develop better strains.

Some 1,400 varieties of pear trees are planted at this station, and many of them are more than one variety, through grafting. Here, too, is the daddy of all the valley's blight-resistant trees. It was one which resisted blight inoculations, made by Dr. F. C. Reimer, original and long-time superintendent of the station. Seedlings grown from this tree's seeds are used to form tree parts, usually roots, which provide the basis for blight-resistant producing trees.

Other experiments in developing more colorful pears are also under way at the station.

One of the highlights of the trip was a talk by Professor Hartman on the seemingly-dry topic of when to pick pears. However, Hartman's explanation, retailing the many reasons fruit should not be picked too soon, and then

telling why they must not be picked too late, made the talk an interesting one to the fruitmen, whose livelihood depends on timing, as well as the vagaries

of weather. In previous years, Hartman pointed out, almost all fruit was picked too soon, for fear of its dropping from the tree. More

recently, with the development of hormone sprays which keep fruit on the trees, the tendency has been in the opposite direction, although from 90 to 95 per

cent of the fruit is now picked at approximately the right time, he said.

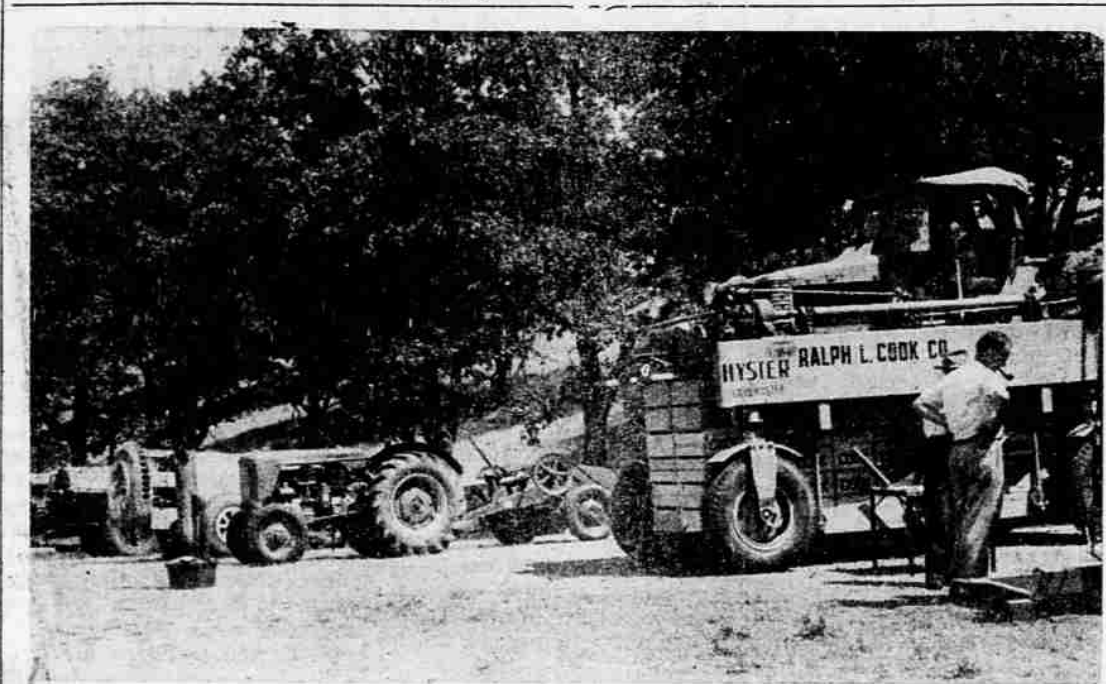
A presure test, recently developed on the basis of many years records, is the most effective way of judging the exact moment which is best for fruit which will be stored in cold packing houses. A discussion of the many diseases and pests which are the bane of fruit men's existence was given by Dr. Gentner, and he illustrated his talk with examples of the pests he described. The Pear Psylla, a recent invader of the valley, is a tiny, almost invisible insect, which can do great damage to pear trees because it is so tremendously prolific. Several billions of insects can develop in just a few generations from one female fly. Effective sprays, however, can keep it under control, provided they are applied sufficiently and properly, Dr. Gentner explained. Another pest is the spider mite, and great strides have been made in recent years in conquering this pest, particularly through the use of newly-developed systemic poisons, which are put around the roots or lower parts of the tree, and which are then absorbed into the tree itself, thus poisoning the mites. These poisons are still experimental, and not being used commercially. The conclusion of the tour was at TouVelle park, where a picnic luncheon was served by ladies of the Phoenix Grange, and where dealers in equipment showed off their wares.

The demonstrations gave a good idea of the "mechanical revolution" which has swept the industry in recent years, with specialized vehicles designed to

handle boxed pears much more rapidly than can be done by hand, by automatic spray rigs which douse trees with chemicals as they are pulled by tractor

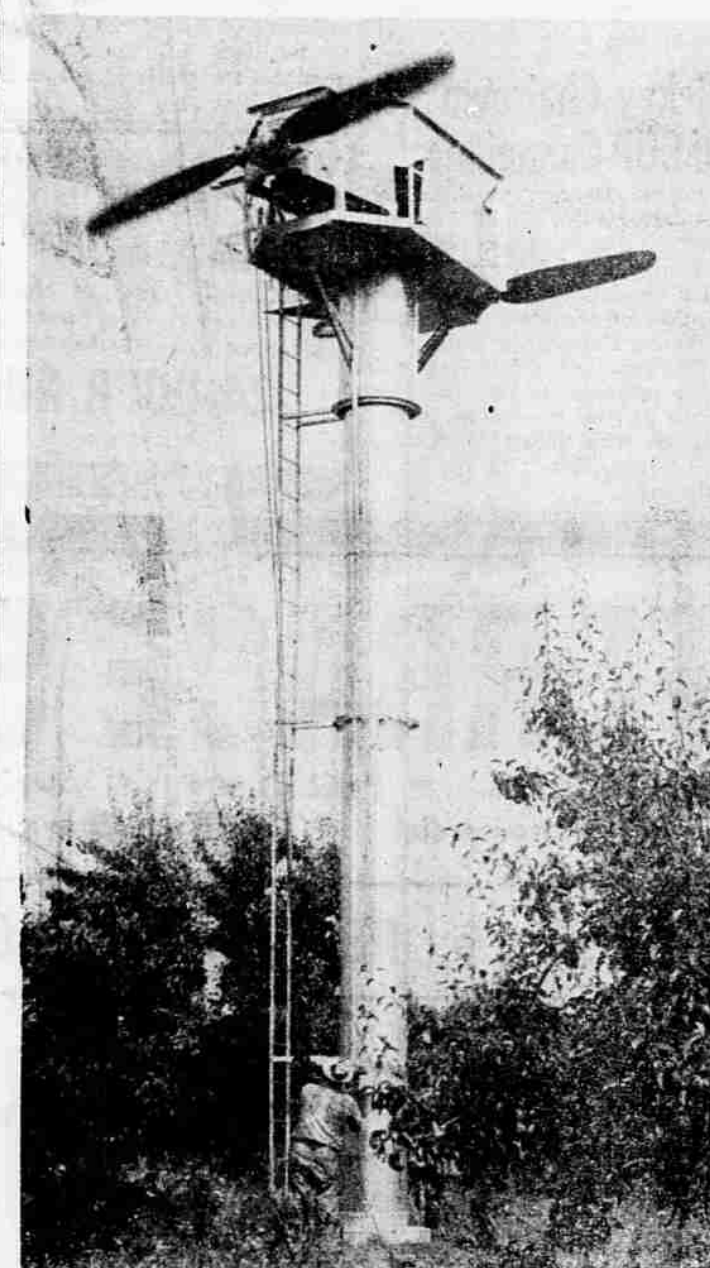
through orchards, and with other special equipment. The field day tour was the second one held in the valley, and fruit men here plan to make

it an annual affair. Not only fruit men, but any others interested in the problems of horticulture and pear raising, are welcome to attend.



EQUIPMENT DEMONSTRATED — Following the picnic luncheon for orchard tour members on August 1, an equipment demonstration was held at TouVelle park. At right is Hyster straddle truck used for carrying pear boxes; next is ground beater with tractor, used for

cutting weeds and cover crops; and beyond that are sprayers. In front of the sprayers is a "smokeless" type heater, which some orchards use, but which is considerably more expensive than old-type heating pots with which most orchards are equipped.



WIND MACHINE—Shown above is a rotating type windmill in experimental use this year at Klamath orchard. Wind machines are being tried, with strictly limited success, as substitutes for smudging. The tall machine, operated by two engines with big airplane propellers, has raised orchard temperatures two degrees or so, but only for a maximum radius of 500 feet. The expense, and the necessity for many such machines, coupled with the fact that there is seldom a layer of warm air in the Rogue valley for the machines to draw down, limits their practical use.

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