

Practices That Aid in the Delivery of Large Size Prunes

Richard Buchner

Overall profitability is a major goal in successful prune production and a major component in any prune management system. Large prune crops in 1996 and 1997 have stimulated considerable interest in undersize fruit. Undersize prunes currently have marginal value and may represent a net loss because of costs to haul, dry and to market order payments on low value prunes. One technique to control delivery size is to field size at harvest. Field sizing involves installing size-sorting devices on harvesters, which allow small prunes to fall out while valuable fruit is collected. Field sizing is considered a "risky" strategy because of the potential to remove prunes with economic value.

During the 1997 harvest, twenty-one infield harvest sizing evaluations were made in prune orchards throughout Tehama county. The first evaluation occurred on 8/12/97 at the start of prune harvest. The final evaluation was done on 9/5/97 at the tail end of harvest. The objective was to sample throughout the harvest period to test field sizing under various sugar, size and fruit pressure scenarios. The test machine was 1-inch bar sizer.

Of the 21 sample dates, undersize fruit was clearly not marketable in 20 of the 21 samples. Discarded fruit averaged 133 dry count per pound. Only one sample out of 21 may have had market value at 86 dry count per pound. Although small in size, these prunes had very high sugar content contributing to their dry weight.

In this evaluation, a 1-inch bar sizer did a good job of separating fruit with and without market value under the 1997 price schedule. As harvest date becomes later and soluble solids increase, the chances of sorting out marketable prunes also increases.

E-mail as a Tool to Extend Pest Management Information to Orchard Farmers

Richard Buchner

Increasing interest in computer technology as a management tool coupled with the increase of home computers led to the idea of weekly pest management updates using electronic mail. Timely, accurate pest management updates should reduce or eliminate unnecessary pesticide application.

In 1997, the pilot program started with an article in the UCCE Tehama county January issue of *Fruit and Nut Notes*. The article described the Internet; Integrated Pest Management on-line; and an invitation for interested growers to sign up for e-mail insect

and disease management updates. Four growers responded and the first of 23 updates was e-mailed 4/18/97.

A typical update listed current day degree and biofix information for codling and oriental fruit moth, peach twig borer and navel orange worm; plus brief descriptions of orchard events and potential problems to keep an eye on. Grower response has been favorable:

- “Getting information out via e-mail is an efficient way to reach growers.”
- “It was really worthwhile and helped with spray timing.”
- “Thanks for the info this year.”

In addition to positive grower response, the e-mail list grew from 4 to 11 addresses during the first season.

E-mail does have potential as an information delivery system to local growers and represents a viable method to extend pest management information and provide a basis for good pesticide application decisions.