

TREE CROP INTERN

F. Niederholzer

C. DeBuse

PROBLEM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

How can the University of California (UC) and agricultural industries work together to deliver practical research and educational programs to growers and support industries at a time of shrinking public support for UC?

State support for the University of California (UC), on a per student basis, has declined 60% since 1990. Budget cuts have affected all divisions (campuses) of the UC.

In the last decade, the UC ANR core work group for prune production has dwindled from six campus faculty/specialists (DeJong, Shackel, Polito, Southwick, Elmore, and Thompson) and six farm advisors (Reil, Olson, Krueger, Buchner, Niederholzer, and Sibbett) to two campus faculty member (DeJong and Hanson) and three advisors (Fichtner, Niederholzer, and Buchner). One of the three remaining advisors has administrative duties that limit his availability for field activities. In three years, it is possible that the campus number will be one (Hanson) and there will be just two farm advisors with a significant focus on dried plum production (Fichtner and Niederholzer). Sustained support is needed to maintain current commitments (prune rootstock trial) and develop new research and education programs as the remaining advisors will be stretched to support dried plum and other commodities as well as statewide responsibilities previously filled by campus based extension specialists.

In addition, the UC is hiring new advisors. The new advisors will each cover more than one county and multiple commodities. In all probability, given the shrinking state support for UC, it will not be feasible to return farm advisor staffing to 1990 level. In order to fill any open positions with highly qualified individuals and ease their “learning curve”, those persons should have experience with California tree crop productions systems and the UC system.

OBJECTIVES

- Provide sustained support (60%) for a qualified UC employee to work on prune production research and education in the Sacramento Valley.
- Help existing farm advisors deliver applied research and extension to prune growers.

PROCEDURES

- Specific tasks and deliverables will be determined after discussion with prune industry. Search and hiring will not begin until funding is available – no sooner than late summer, 2012. Possible project topics include:
 - Mult-year study on prune growth to identify more exactly the plant and

environmental factors and fruit growth timings that most directly impact final dried fruit size.

- Crop management strategies that maximize consistent grower return per acre.
 - Thinning strategies
 - Pruning for maximum thinning efficiency
 - Field sizing research and publications to minimize the loss of valuable fruit while avoiding delivering poor quality fruit.
- Developing annual prune almanac calendar similar to what has been done in the past by the California Canning Peach Association.
- Developing publications to support sustainable prune production.
- Additional funding will be sought to bring funding for this position to full time employment.
- A mentoring committee of 6-8 individuals, including:
 - The supervising advisor (Niederholzer)
 - Several additional, experienced advisors
 - Several prune growers and/or PCAs

The mentoring committee will meet with the intern at least twice per year. The committee will evaluate the intern at the end of the first year. Unsatisfactory evaluation will result in non-renewal of contract.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An intern will be hired to work from mid-January to mid-March, 2013. This individual was the 2012 UC/Almond Board Intern. This person will contribute to the UCCE Sacramento Valley Regional Prune Newsletter (Bloom addition) as well as field work on the prune rootstock trial (Yuba and Yolo County sites) and the 2013 Heat at Bloom project. In addition, he will give a presentation on weed management in prunes at the South Sacramento Valley Prune Day in early March, 2013.

Recruiting for a new intern will be conducted later in 2013.