

Peach Crop Near Total Loss Statewide



At one of the Penn State test plots at Hollabaugh Bros. Orchard, the only blooms seen the past week were at the snow line. The several feet of snow acted as a cover and protected some buds, according to Bill Kleiner, fruit specialist.



Growers can also examine information about the new Canadian winter-hardy peach varieties now under testing at Penn State. But research is still out on how well the trees can tolerate severe cold. Here, Kleiner inspects the Harken variety.



Peaches "just aren't as (cold) hardy as apples," said Kleiner. "Peaches just can't take that temperature." A peach bud was destroyed by the severe winter.

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to various fruit tree research studies, recorded a temperature of minus 18 degrees in mid-January this year. Some growers, according to Kleiner, reported temperatures down to minus 30 in spots. "Depending on where you were in the county, it just wiped the whole crop out," he said.

At one of the Penn State test plots at Hollabaugh Bros. Orchard, the only blooms seen the past week were at the snow line. The several feet of snow acted as a cover and protected some buds.

"We've seen a few on some sites, some trees, mostly on the buds that were protected by the snow," said Kleiner.

At another site, cold and ice stress has caused limbs to break, resulting in canker formation.

For many growers, it will involve some tough decision-making regarding harvest of the crop, where bloom is sporadic at best.

Also, seasonal workers who help harvest the peach crop will have to reschedule, although the apple bloom is moving along quickly and, if the weather and other factors are right, there is hope for a good harvest.

Some damage was reported by growers on apple trees (particularly the Red Delicious variety) and sweet cherries might have been affected. But those affects were no where near as severe as the losses growers face to peach orchards.

Some growers in Adams County have particularly large-size peach operations, according to Scott M. Slaybaugh, who operates Sunny Hill Orchards in Biglerville. Slaybaugh, president of the Adams County Fruit Growers Association, said that, out of a total of 190 acres, about 8.9 percent of his orchards are in stone fruit production, including peaches, nectarines, apricots, and also plums and sweet cherries.

Slaybaugh said the losses "really got to hurt."

"It would be the same for a lot of us if this would happen to apples, but they're a lot tougher," he said. The cold, he said, has "hurt a few of the apples, but not bad."

Slaybaugh said that some of his Gold Delicious applies have also been affected, but doesn't know whether cold weather is to blame or if it is just an "off year." But cold temperatures can affect the peaches — or any fruit —

severely.

"I would think it can eventually get cold enough for anything," said Slaybaugh.

The cherry crop could have been severely affected by the cold temperatures, something that worries Slaybaugh and other growers. "I think it's hurt the cherries a little," he said. "I think it's hurt the cherries more than we realize."

Kleiner and Slaybaugh both agreed that is too early to be able to tell exactly how the damages will

affect the apple industry.

Peaches "just aren't as (cold) hardy as apples," said Kleiner. "Peaches just can't take that temperature."

A combination of climate and genetic factors make some types of fruit more vulnerable to deeply cold temperatures. Apple trees can withstand temperatures to minus 30, according to the fruit specialist.

For now, growers may have to take the loss.

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